# PARTISAN REVIEW

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| THOMAS MANN: HUMANISM IN EXILE | 3 | *William Phillips* |
| THE STATUES | 11 | *Delmore Schwartz* |
| MARRIAGE AND MANNERS IN MANORS | 18 | *Jackson Mathews* |
| KAFKA: FATHER AND SON | 19 | *Max Brod* |
| ASLEEP A KING | 30 | *Eleanor Clark* |
| THEATER CHRONICLE | 43 | *Mary McCarthy* |

BOOKS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Edmund Wilson's Criticism | 48 | *F. W. Dupee* |
| The Dialectic According to Levy | 51 | *Eliseo Vivas* |
| Pompes Funebres | 54 | *Harry Levin* |
| Lynch Patterns | 57 | *James T. Farrell* |
| Two Views of Cummings | 58 | *Philip Horton* |
| | 61 | *Sherry Mangan* |
| Odyssey in a Circle | 63 | *Anita Brenner* |


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SHORT STORY CONTEST. PARTISAN REVEW will award a prize of $100 to the author of the best story submitted before June 1st, 1938. Conditions: PARTISAN REVIEW reserves the right to publish, at our usual rates, any of the stories submitted; only unpublished stories will be considered; contestants may submit as many stories as they like; all manuscripts must by typewritten and accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the winning story will be announced in the July (1938) issue.

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# THOMAS MANN: HUMANISM IN EXILE

William Phillips

LET US NOT BE HYPNOTIZED by the drum-beats of progress . . . by the propaganda of hope. We have heard them before, especially on dark days; and they have come from governments and parties that wish to conceal some perfidy. If so many intellectuals have fallen prey to these deceptions, it is out of desperation; it is because they are ready to seize upon any escape from their terrible fears and doubts.

These are symptoms of intellectual crisis. The economic crisis looms larger; we are all but paralyzed by the political crisis; but the intellectual crisis is even more profound because the values of the mind are no longer respected.

How shall we characterize the modern intellectual? His normal condition, to-day, seems to be that of a liberal, anti-fascist; indeed this is the dominant type. Yet it is he who in the name of progress suppresses insurgency, in the name of peace clamors for war, in the name of truth condones lies. He has forgotten his vital function in society: to safeguard the dreams and discoveries of science and art, and to champion some political movement insofar as it fulfills the requirements of an intellectual ideal. Far from advancing any intellectual program, he has tumbled, head over heels, into politics, and we see him in every magazine, at every meeting, urging upon us the betrayals of yesterday as the salvation for to-day.

All the greater is our admiration for Thomas Mann, one of the few antifascists who has raised his voice against the growing dictatorship of the lie, in the domain of "progressives" as well as reactionaries. A partisan of no political party or program, beyond that of antifascism, Mann insists on those values without which any political program is a mere "lying propaganda of future triumphs." Reading between Mann's lines, one can almost hear him saying: We have dedicated ourselves to the fight against fascism because it destroys the



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integrity of thought. But to what end—if we, ourselves, should be indifferent to the truth, however faintly it stirs, and however great may be the cost of our speaking up?

*Measure and Value**—this is Mann's intellectual program. It may sound exotic to ears accustomed to the blare of simple, rousing slogans. Is this some new cult—post-dada? On the contrary, Mann's program is an indictment, for, according to Mann, it is the indifference to measure and value which marks the collapse of Western culture. "The truth is," says Mann, "that measure and value are lost in our time. Whole countries, groups, parties, and party dogmas to-day assert and pursue unrestrained their subjective values; every universal criterion has been frightfully done to death in the mad, destructive struggle which is tearing our world in pieces."

The morality, art, and humanity of European civilization, which placed man at the center of human affairs, which made of the mind a balance in which all events are weighed, are being swept aside by a new barbarism of power and utility. If the crimes of the totalitarian regimes are justified as useful to the maintenance of power, still it is only the maintenance of power which has made them necessary. An infamous pragmatism, Mann calls it: "An infamous pragmatism has been set up in the heart of Europe to-day. It refuses to make distinctions between truth and lies; it denies mind and spirit in favor of interest; it unscrupulously commits or condones crimes if they forward its interest—or what it conceives to be so; it shrinks not at all from falsification, rather it calls falsification truth, provided it is useful, in its interpretation of the word. . . . There is nothing more infamous than it, it is infamy itself and the source and fount of all that is infamous . . . it is barbarism. . . . The barbarous is to us not only the esthetically but also the morally worthless and base. It is first and foremost the lie—in the boundless scorn for which artist and moralist are one."

Is there a political solution for this intellectual plight? Mann professes to see none. In addition to his bias against politics—a "non-political man" he has called himself—there is the plain fact that the dominant parties of revolutionary pretensions have substituted organized for individual demagogy. "Even the revolutionary terminology," says Mann, "is hopelessly discredited and compromised, it is utterly worn out, having served these ten years and more to persuade the herd-minded citizen to think of himself as a revolutionary." Has the

* A programmatic statement by Thomas Mann, in a new antifascist magazine of the same title, edited by Mann in collaboration with other German exiles. It is reprinted in the Winter, 1937, number of *Life and Letters Today*.

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banner of "revolution," which has set so many feet in motion, raised the stature of man?

As compared with most of the incitements to action, the program of Thomas Mann is static in its nobility. It seeks to restore to the European mind those qualities which made possible its creative glories, which made possible the selection, out of the free exchange of the most diverse intelligences, its permanent treasures. These qualities Mann calls *measure* and *value*.

Let Mann himself define them: "These words, *measure* and *value,* are above all conceptions and symbols from the domain of the arts. Measure: that is order, that is light, the music of creation and the creative world. It means also what is achieved, what is wrested from chaos: it is the anti-barbaric, the triumph of the human. It does not mean the average, the mediocre—art is altogether the sphere of boldness and hazards, it always goes to extremes, it never lacks the 'trace of audacity' without which, according to Goethe, 'no talent is thinkable.' It abhors the mediocre, as it abhors the trivial, the tasteless, and the low, the despicable cliché; for it is pure quality, it stands for the unsatisfied, insatiable demand. And its *measure,* which it bears within itself, is also the measure which is applied: the test, the judgment, the scale upon which it is dangerous to be weighed, for it soon becomes more than simply a test in matters of taste and pronounces upon values far beyond esthetic ones, antecedent and fundamental to these. It is, in short, value itself, in the most basic sense of the word."

Against the forces of barbarism, Thomas Mann pits the artist, the archtype of European man, the carrier of the highest traditions and achievements of European civilization. Mann calls himself a humanist and a Christian, too; but to him the artist, the humanist, and the Christian are really one. Representing somewhat different historical and institutional forces, all three, nevertheless, have contributed to our ideals of truth, moral discipline, and creativity. "Christianity," says Mann, "has always made so high and austere a demand upon the spirit of man that scarcely anybody can realize it here on earth save as a guide and corrective and spur to the conscience. But just for that reason we need it more than ever as a means of moral discipline in these times of confusion and demoralization. . . . For whenever we are concerned with values and their defense, with the preservation of a universally applicable human standard, then we must stand, firmly and in freedom, upon the human culture of occidental Christianity." And Mann has defined his humanism as "spirit,

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an intellectual frame of mind, a state of the human soul which implies justice, liberty, knowledge and tolerance; doubt too, not as an end in itself, but as a means of seeking truth; solicitous effort to free this truth from all the presumptions of those who try to hide it under a bushel. . . . Would it not be best and simplest to consider humanism as the *contrary of fanaticism?*"

Christianity, however, is subject to the mutations of its institutional life; and humanism is but a principle. It is, therefore, natural for Mann, who thinks of society as a mass of individuals, who are unfortunately not the subject but the object of history, and from whose grasp the ideas of order and light are constantly slipping, to conceive of the artist as destined by the very laws of his being to preserve the values of our civilization.

This conflict between the artist and society is in fact one of the basic conceptions of Mann's novels and stories. We see it especially in Tonio Krôger, who felt that "one must die to life to be utterly a creator," and in Aschenbach, who looks to the external world to compensate for his artistic sclitude, only to find that he has thereby destroyed all the fruits of his life. Why? In his essay on *Goethe and Tolstoy,* Mann contrasts the idea of *folk* with that of *humanity,* describing the Nazi pagan-collectivity as folk-barbarism. Folk is the principle of collectivity on a physical, animal basis. Humanity, on the other hand, is the striving of man to transcend his animalism: it is the bond of dignity and culture and freedom which unites men. It is the ideal of the world-city, the spiritual home of man. Since humanity, however, is the special property of the artist, he inevitably comes into conflict with the growing folk-tendencies of society.

Paradoxically, though, Mann regards art as a disease, for the ailments of man come from his attempt to assert his humanity. Health, in its animal sense, is the automatic adjustment to envirqnment; while the diseases of the mind lie in its restlessness, its dissatisfactions, in the fact that it contantly hovers between the ecstasies of discovery and the agonies of doubt. "The genius of disease," says Mann, "is more human than the genius of health." To-day the conflict is sharper, with all the advantages on the side of barbarism; and if this is but the operation of a universal law, as Mann apparently conceives it to be, there can be little hope that the values of the artist will ever triumph. His martyrdom is his constant struggle against odds: the pathology of art involves a belief in the essential barbarism of man. There is a striking confirmation of this principle of doom in *The Magic Mountain,* where Settembrini, the humanist, for all his splendid moments, is essentially a stricken being.

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Thomas Mann's program, we said, is based on the traditions and achievements of European man, on his magnificent researches into freedom and on his bondage to the forms of social life. The European man of Thomas Mann is frozen within his ideals and his fetters, because, as Thomas Mann sees him in his art and morality, which distinguish him from the man of Egypt or the man of Jerusalem in kind but not in essence, he is incomplete. He lacks science, the most characteristic product of the European mind. Science has created the form of our civilization; it built our cities; it provided our sustenance; it refined our language; it guided our imagination and checked its excesses; it rested the power of generalization on the scrupulousness of fact; it enthroned reason as the principle of knowledge. In attempting to carry on the spirit of Goethe and Luther, Mann has forgotten Newton and Galileo.

Art records our dreams of truth and freedom and our efforts to attain them, and morality is the watchman of the social conscience; yet both art and morality are powerless before the forces that shape our fate. Nor can they guide us through the labyrinths of social doctrines and movements. Shall we inquire of art whether the coming war will end wars or whether the existing democratic system can stave off its own destruction at the hands of fascism? These are political and economic question, scientific questions!—among which the artist becomes a Hamlet of the laboratory. At most, art has acted to keep alive the human purposes of science and to protest every sign of their perversion. If the artist cannot himself arrive at a true analysis, he can at least condemn those who would displace it with a patent lie. These are the boundaries of art. Envisioning the most far-reaching ideals, the artist is, nevertheless, isolated from those forces which can realize them.

It is science which has enabled us to overcome the conditions of our existence. Not only in nature, but in history; for science has given us some understanding of the necessities of social life. The extension of scientific method into history, has helped to strip it of its legends and prejudices, introducing order, direction, and law. We now see that the present is a precarious balance between the past and the future; and though the forces which transform the present are limited, there still remains for us a latitude of choice. We are approaching a science of history, based on the costant refinement of the empirical method as applied to the study of class behavior. Beginning with the speculations of Aristotle, through Adam Smith, Ricardo, Hegel,

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we came to Marx, to Lenin, to Trotsky. . . . The Russian revolution was guided by certain principles of history, and we now turn to those principles to find the causes for its degeneration. We aim to be scientific socialists, having learned that private property is the instrument of man's alienation from his hopes and ideals, and that the curve of socialism is plotted not only by the laws of production but also by the intentions of men. We have learned so much about the sciences of economics and politics that we can no longer accept political rhetoric as evidence of political leadership. We can check political programs against social realities.

More than that, we have learned that the fertility and animation of European culture were nourished by science. As Europe was transformed from an agricultural community into a vast factory for producing the most complicated machines of life, the ambitions of its mind grew until it now produces the most subtle visions out of the most solid knowledge. Before Shakespeare we had to have the new merchant and his bustling market-place and his young science to chart his new explorations. Before Goethe we had to have the industrial revolution and Robespierre. So the imagination of modern art bursts through the world-culture of Einstein and Freud and teems with the multitude of ideas and events that fill our days. We dream of socialism, but we do not come empty-handed to the threshold of a new world. We come with the riches of science.

Above all, science is the avenue to the concrete observation of our surroundings. Hence, in omitting science from his image of the European psyche, Thomas Mann has cut himself off from the *data* of modern existence. In this sense he is our metaphysical rather than our historical contemporary. A bold critic of our tragic moods, our moral corruptions, our intellectual and esthetic barbarisms—of all the symptoms of decay, he is, however, indifferent to the actual sources and sponsors of decay. Alive to our spiritual maladies, he never inquires into the plot of our profane history. What has brought us to the edge of the precipice? We are surrounded by political shepherds who would lead us into new pastures: who are the true and who are the false ones? Are the democratic pieties to guarantee our intellectual fate? The *lie* has entered the marrow of our lives— but who are the liars? How can we restore *measure* and *value?* True, Mann is outspoken in condemning fascism, but we have seen that indignation is not enough, for it does not lay bare its causes. We cannot accept Mann as our historic contemporary because he is not concerned with contemporary history.

To-day, even more than at any other time in the past, we must unmask our false prophets. This is a period of *masquerade*. Rogues

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ply the trade of revolution; reactionaries pose as liberals; liberals have become the attorneys for Stalin. Peace, progress, and freedom have become the universal gospel of our time, while double dealing and chicanery are reaching almost inconceivable proportions. We are asked to believe that the "democratic" nations which led us to one imperialist war and are now preparing another will save the world for peace and democracy . . . those part-time socialists who have already exceeded their quota of betrayals still proclaim the hope of socialism . . . the Stalinist bureaucracy, clipping the coupons of October, institutes a regime of terror and lies, and works feverishly to stifle revolution and promote war . . . intellectuals express bewilderment and flock to the largest propaganda machines. . . .

The irony of Thomas Mann's position is that while he does not concern himself with history, history concern itself with him. For his high-minded humanism is exploited by those very agencies that are most indifferent to the fate of humanity. "Humanism" has long been the official uniform of the bourgeoisie; and in these times of stress, when it can maintain its existence only through ever greater oppression of other classes, the bourgeoisie appropriates the full rhetoric of idealism. Our parliamentary demagogues find little difficulty in identifying themselves with abstract programs of truth and freedom which conceal history behind a facade of morality.

Even more cynical are the leaders of the Communist party, who present daily the most monstrous lies and slanders in the lyrical diction of humanism. Not content with having baptized themselves as the saviours of humanity, they dismiss every one of their critics as an "enemy of humanity." While the Communist press pays homage to to the nobility of Thomas Mann, the police-state of Moscow transforms its artists into robots of servility. While the cult of infallibility is built around the person of Stalin, Communists still profess the ideals of liberalism—of arriving at truth through scientific method and democratic opinion. The Moscow Trials which made a mockery out of the October Revolution, are celebrated as a great stride toward truth and progress.

Of what use is the most intransigent program of measure and value, if we do not name its despoilers?

Can we demand of Thomas Mann that he trace the debasement of culture to its material roots? Or shall we be content to say of him, as André Gide has: "Our world is not yet lost. It cannot be, as long as a voice like yours is raised in warning. As long as consciences like

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yours remain watchful and faithful, we shall not lose confidence—we shall not despair."

Let us rather try to understand Mann's predicament.

It is the predicament of the intellectual conscience, clinging to the conditions of its own enslavement. Not only does Mann's program call for no change in the existing social order, but in identifying the European mind with European society, Mann is unable to perceive that the structure of European society shackles the ideals of the European mind. Even his anti-fascism rests its hopes on the very source of fascism, the democratic states, for Mann is unaware of the historical continuity between the more liberal moods of the bourgeoisie and its fascist extremity.

Defending morality without history, art without science, culture without politics, envisioning no social action which might ensure intellectual freedom, Mann's program becomes an agony of the individual conscience—one more symptom of the tragic state of our world.

*(The June issue of* PARTISAN REVIEW *will contain an essay by William Troy, "Thomas Mann: Myth and Reason," dealing with Mann's creative development from his early fiction to the Joseph books.)*

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# THE STATUES

## Delmore Schwartz

*for Meyer Schapiro*

THE SNOW began to fall late in the afternoon on the 8th of December. Faber Gottschalk, a dentist of thirty, was walking to his office to meet one of his patients and he was scarcely aware of the first few feathers of snow, having had a whiskey and soda but a moment before. The pleasant bonfire which liquor set up throughout his being permitted him to think of the next hour without his usual disgust. What he resented most about his profession, as I learned later, was the intimacy which it obviously involved. To put his fingers in the mouths of hundreds of people in order to find decay, food particles, pus; to do this day after day, so that it occupied the forefront of his consciousness; to be faced by the naked and cracked claws or stalactites of human appetite; to regard at any rate, his means of making a living from this standpoint could clearly have no effect other than to make his existence a constant evasion of what immediately presented itself before him, whether the dinner which he ate, or the traffic and the faces on the street, or, as on this afternoon, the first signs of that delicate and perfect fulfillment of winter, the snow.

It was night before the sidewalks were covered and midnight before the remarkable character of the snow was observable, so that only the nightfolk, the police, the watchmen, the habitués of night clubs, knew before morning that an extraordinary and inexplicable and even terrifying event had occurred. By morning, however, that portion of the populace which was on its way to work was busy examining the strange shapes into which the snow had solidified. Not only had the snowfall formed curious and unmistakeable designs, some of which were very human, but also the snow had the hardness of rocks and could not be removed. The morning newspapers devoted three columns on the first page to the event, commenting especially upon the difficulty of removing the snow and including photographs of the statues, as the snow objects were soon called. The photographs



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had been made before morning with the aid of flashes and thus emphasized the uncanny appearances which presented themselves on all sides.

I was at that time a reporter on one of the metropolitan newspapers and the city editor had instructed me to go out and talk to as many people as possible, so that I could write a column of paragraphs about the way in which various persons had responded to the event. I was told to play up the whimsical and the comical aspects of the situation, the amazement of the housewife, the repugnance of the street-cleaner and janitor, the joy of the school children, and the inevitable fabulous lying of the old-timers who would claim to have seen this kind of thing before and in a grander style. Very soon, however, I found that there was nothing either whimsical or comical about the attitudes of the populace, but that they were, on the contrary, seriously moved. And it was by going about in this way and interviewing many people casually in the street that I met Faber Gottschalk, the dentist.

The whole day after the snowfall became an unofficial holiday or fête. All private concerns were virtually ignored, all tasks absentmindedly attended to, while everyone discussed, analyzed, and sought to explain the remarkable snow and its statues. The day was warm, sunny, and glittering, as often happens after a great fall of snow, and the air was of delightful purity and sweetness. At noon the Mayor issued a statement to the press in which he promised that the snow would be cleared away as soon as possible and this promise, which was printed in the early editions of the afternoon newspapers, provided the first example of the unanimity and intensity of feeling of the whole city toward the statues. Everyone acted at once and in an identical fashion. The Mayor was deluged by phone-calls and even telegrams protesting against the removal of the snow, and even the various assistants and secretaries of the Mayor joined in exhorting him to do nothing about the snow. Faber Gottschalk, however, went further; he attempted to visit the Mayor at City Hall, astonished at himself, unable to understand his passionate concern about the snow's statues, but determined to do nothing all day but walk about and regard them, cancelling all his appointments in order to do so.

A mathematician at Columbia University gave out an interview in which he stated that the laws of probability made the occurrence one which was highly probable, sooner or later. Ministers of the various organized religions revised their sermons for the following Sunday immediately, most of them taking the standpoint that the curious snowfall could be taken as a literary allegory, although none of them ventured to suppose that any supernatural agency, divine

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or evil, was involved. The children, to whom I paid especial attention during this first day, delighted for a time in the comic-strip character of some of the statues, but later some of them became annoyed that snowballs could not be fashioned out of the hard snow, and in their frustration they threw other available objects at each other, one boy of fourteen going so far as to open his brother's skull with a hockey stick. Faber Gottschalk walked from the apartment (which constituted both home and office to him) to the Battery. Since his apartment was at 640 W. 184 Street, on Washington Heights, this walk was one of about ten miles, from one end to the other of Manhattan's long and narrow spine. Then he walked back again along the same route, surprised to find that the statues which studded his route disclosed new and even more interesting aspects when they were regarded for the second time. By evening he was in his apartment, seated by his radio in the living room, and attempting to understand the emotion which had overwhelmed him at the sight of so many of the snow's statues. As he turned the whole day over in his mind, he smoked one cigar after another, gratified by the tobacco and yet able to distinguish in his mind between the pleasure of the cigar and the great happiness which had suddenly come upon him since waking up early in the morning and discovering the strange snow below the window. In seeking an explanation for his emotion, Faber Gottschalk thought of his past life, of the pattern or fate or host of accidents which had brought him to this day. As he told me later, he had been persuaded to study dentistry by the uncle with whom he lived after his mother's death. His great ambition had been to be an athlete and, lacking that, a sports writer. In fact, he was not quite sure whether he wanted the one activity or the other the most. It was the whole context of the sporting world, especially that of major league baseball, which interested him above all things. His physical equipment was such as to prevent him from being very good at any sport, so that soon he had become merely a spectator. To be truly a spectator, however, is a great deal, for it involves the most intense partisanship. In major league baseball, for example, one who is a fan follows the odyssey of one's team—in Gottschalk's instance, it was the New York Giants—for six months and more of each year, beginning with the spring training camps and culminating at times in the vast excitement of the World Series, through various stages of hope and despair at the team's fortunes as it travels again and again to the eight cities of the league. At any rate, his uncle had pointed out to him that as a dentist he would have a modest income and would be able to arrange his hours of work in such a way as to permit him to attend the various sports which absorbed his attention throughout

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the year. His uncle had been right; he had arrived at the age of thirty with the profound distaste for his profession of which I have already spoken and with a set of habits directed to his enjoyment of professional sport. During the long evening, seated in the darkness of the living room and going to the window once in a while to look down upon the street, (where the figures lay, blue-white and ghastly corpses in the dimness of midnight) Faber Gottschalk was not able to explain to himself by this examination of his past life the reason for his emotion about the statues.

## II

In the week of perfect weather which followed, the snow did not melt. It retained its various shapes and remained firmly attached to the ground, as if it were a natural growth of the asphalt. Automobiles had to move circumspectly and circuitously about the statues, and in general the process of passage, whether walking or riding, was modified. When the newspapers had exhausted most of the approaches to the subject of which they were capable, when thousands had come from out of town to see the sights, and remained, unable to depart, as if fascinated, then I observed a distinct change in the consciousness of the populace, both middle-class and proletarian. During the day, many would go to the window to look down at the statues, and during the lunch hour many would eat hurriedly, standing at the counter, or not at all, in order to be able to get outside and look at the creations of the fall. The strikes which were going on at that time continued as before with no abatement, with no difference except that the pickets were often absorbed in the figures outstretched upon the white ground and in this contemplation they were joined by the police who, despite this unity of interest, did not in the least cease to harass the pickets. Sometimes, in fact, even a boss would pass by on the way to his office, and pause to look at the statues, and look up again only to gaze with undisguised hatred at the pickets. In general, everyone did what he was supposed to do, but with more devotion and concentration, and more efficiently, and with moments of complete attention for the statues, no matter where they happened to be. From each borough of New York City came reports of the figures in various localities, indicating an equal absorption on the part of everyone, an absorption which seemed to rise above the habits and acts of daily existence, but not to destroy them. The only exception to this carrying out of daily existence was Faber Gottschalk who spent all of his time going from one end of New York to another, attempting to see all of the statues.

Many of the statues were grotesque and even monstrous, espe-

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cially the ones which resembled human figures, for in such examples, although the whole form was of perfect verisimilitude, the face was either blank as a plate, or ugly and twisted, like gargoyles, or sometimes obscene, as when, in several suburbs, figures clung to each other in a fashion which could scarcely be called ambiguous. Elsewhere, however, the shapes had the plumpness and rotundity of great white clouds, the solidity and stillness of fine buildings, and the delicate detail of certain flowers, or indeed of a snow crystal. Everywhere there were shapes which delighted the eye partly because they were beautiful fresh complexes of previously known designs, or compositions of a kind which had never before been seen. The fondness for them continually increased and many of them were given nicknames, one of them being called "Versailles," because of the way in which it glittered in the sunlight, like light shining upon many mirrors; and another, a very big figure, was named "Caliban." Less gifted names, as I reported them in my news story, were "Sky Folly," "Sestina," "Valledisto," "Parabellem," "Plum Elected," "Old Nick," "Shelley," and "Marianne."

In certain quarters, indeed everywhere for a time, there was much discussion as to the possible sources or causes of the phenomenal snow, but it was soon obvious that the entire system of the snow had been a wonderful chance, like perfect weather. Some for a time spoke of the fecundity of nature; others, those who were habitually alone, thought that this was indeed the way in which the haunted and hunted lives of men took shape—by an unpredictable and continuous fall to which little or no designing will or mind could be attributed. Slowly, after much thought, in the middle of troubled sleep, Faber Gottschalk recognized that for him, at least, these statues were of such grave interest because they resembled the white teeth which were the objects, the subject-matter, so to speak, of his profession. But rcognizing this, an even greater perplexity arose in his mind. Why, in fact, should he take such delight in the statues when teeth were an abomination to him?

Attendance at art galleries, and at theatres became almost meagre, the chief attraction at the motion-picture theatres being the newsreel in which the figures from other parts of the city could be seen. The audience, I observed, was as much interested in the way in which the people in the newsreels regarded the statues, their attitudes, I mean, as in the statues themselves, although it would be difficult to draw a distinction here. No one laughed, although one audience became angry when a boy of thirteen was shown in the process of drawing a mustache on one of the figures. No; the audience regarded the scenes on the screen with the greatest seriousness, and once I saw a woman

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weeping at the sight of a crowd of men standing before a statue and merely staring at it. On the whole, however, apart from these visits to the movies to see the newsreel, amusements, bars, restaurants, and especially museums and theaters lost a great deal of patronage. And yet those most directly concerned in the matter, the proprietors and managers, did not seem to be especially troubled, won over, perhaps, by the general feeling that all was well, at least for the time being.

As I said, many of the figures were very beautiful; one of them in particular, located in the middle of Central Park, seemed to be a rich fulfillment of the plastic imagination. And yet there was, on the other hand, one figure so shocking, so appalling, that certain of the citizens of the neighborhood petitioned the Mayor for its removal by dynamite. It was this which was responsible for the one harsh conflict of that whole period of good feeling, for immense numbers of people upon hearing of the petition immediately protested, demanding that that dread statue remain intact, and communicating the sentiment, by this time conscious and explicit, that every object of the fall was in some way important and to be attended to with the greatest of care, to be preserved at all costs, not destroyed. The situation brought Faber Gottschalk hurrying to the scene, the most avid advocate of leaving the statue intact; and it was thus that I me him.

III

On a street corner, near the lamp-post, standing on the rumble-seat of a motor car, he was engaged in haranguing a huge crowd, most of whom were decidedly on his side. He was near the end of his speech, it seemed, and was trying to get a certain conclusiveness or resolution into what he said, but was troubled, I could see, by the fact that he did not completely understand his idea himself.

"—so I say to you," he said, "that there is every reason to believe that we have no right to alter or modify any of these things. Now those who have been in favor of getting rid of this statue, which they consider obscene, have told us that children would be corrupted by it. I will not say in reply that we cannot permit our lives and our surroundings to be determined by what the children will see or will not see. That would be an easy answer, although a good one. And I will not advance the argument that those of us who really know children and have lived with them are aware of the fact that it is the children, not we nor these statues, who are corrupt, so that our adult fires are often a long suffering attempt to free ourselves from the utter corruption of childhood and even infancy. I myself remember very well how at the age of eight, when I visited my aunt's house, my two feminine cousins, aged eleven and nine, took me into the closet and taught me certain things of which I must already have been somehow

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aware, because I was not surprised by what they did to me. But apart from these considerations and apart from the children, who can be trusted, I assure you, to take care of themselves, I want to impress upon your minds this fact above all, namely, that anything which delights or interests or fascinates the eye and the mind of man must be very important and very valuable. For it would not delight, fascinate, or interest us, unless it had some important relationship to our lives, to what we do, what we want, what we are, what we have known. This is all that I have to say to you and can be summed up in one phrase, that all the statues of the snow are sacred, sacred! and must not be in any way disturbed."

The crowd cheered him vehemently as he dismounted from the rumble-seat of the motor-car, and I went over to interview him. At first he was interested only in repeating to me what he had just said, but then, as we stood by the bar of a nearby café, he gave me the information about himself which I have already set down, repeating again and again the close connection which he felt between the teeth upon which he worked, the sports to which he devoted both his attention and his ardor, and the statues. I suggested to him that he ought not to permit this new passion to disrupt his life; there were, after all, other responsibilities; but he ignored my remark and I recognized, even as I was speaking of it, that if one only became sufficiently absorbed, *absolutely* involved, in this new passion, then it would become the whole world for one, and all things, including one's duties, would be translated into these new terms and present the same difficulties as before, for if one becomes completely interested in a thing, it becomes something else, and not what it seemed to be.

As a result of Gottschalk's speech and the solidarity of other like-minded people, the statue was preserved, and the enchantment which had taken the city of New York continued. At the conclusion of the tenth day of their presence, a period marked by unblemished weather and brilliant blue skies, it was felt on all sides that they were permanent features of the city. The gross figure resembling a giant pharaoh which had descended upon a station of the Elevated was washed clean—the soot of the city had darkened it—by a group of painstaking Elevated passengers, and similar acts of pious ablution were performed all over the city, as I reported in the newspaper. It seemed to indicate a kind of *Burggeist*, this unanimity of feeling.

And then, without warning, a tireless and foul rain descended and much to everyone's surprise and dismay, destroyed the fine statues utterly. Their disappearance was noted on the first page of the next morning's newspapers, but not in the headlines, as their arrival had been. Everyone resumed their usual problems, and old enmities were

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taken up as if they had not been interrupted, as if their continuance had not, in fact, been raised to a higher level for a time. The motion-picture theaters, the galleries, and the libraries enjoyed a sudden flood of patrons, a particularly brutal murder was committed in Brooklyn, the sport pages began to carry news of the ice sports at various winter resorts, a boy of seventeen, scion of a very rich family, disappeared from his home, Faber Gottschalk jumped or fell in front of an onrushing subway train at the 42nd St. station of the I.R.T., and only a few were sufficiently disturbed to keep in mind, with the help of photographs, the brief time in winter when statues had presented their interesting faces on all sides in the city of New York.

## MARRIAGE AND MANNERS IN MANORS

These columns clabbered the blue milk of the moon
And fluted the first sight of sun in the morning,
Heard the hunter horning the late coon
And the pear-bloom bugle an early warning.

When love fruited, the hearty pear was brought
And rolled among the firstlings on the floor:
The first second-hand furniture was bought,
A clear pane put in the stained-glass door.

My love came and was a yellowing pear
Ripened in blankets in a wind-shot house;
Tinkling blossoms fell from the chandelier
Dwindling to the gnawing of a mouse.

A dead-ripe pear on a delicate plate:
The last hinge holding falls from the gate.

JACKSON MATHEWS

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# KAFKA: FATHER AND SON*

Max Brod

ALL HIS LIFE Franz Kafka stood in the shadow of his father's powerful personality. Hermann Kafka was physically impressive: tall, broad-shouldered. His long life had been filled with hard work, rewarded by considerable success in business, burdened by much sickness. He left behind him a large family of children and grandchildren in whom he took a patriarchal pleasure. And after the wholesale house on the Altstädter Ring had been sold, his estate still included a four-story apartment house in the center of Prague. By his own labors and sacrifices he had built up an extensive family and kept it going. This achievement, taking hold of his son's imagination, left its mark on all his work.

In November, 1919 Kafka wrote a lengthy and detailed "Letter to My Father." More than a hundred pages long, the letter was, as I gathered from conversations with Franz, really intended to be given to his father (through his mother); and Franz believed at the time that in this way he could clarify the painfully deadlocked relation between them. Had the letter been delivered, the effect would in all probability have been the opposite of what Franz intended; it could scarcely have helped the father to understand the son. But in any case Frau Kafka did not deliver it: with a gentle word or two she returned it to Franz. And after that we spoke no more of the matter.

"Dear Father," it begins. "You once asked me why I claimed to be afraid of you. As usual I could find no answer, partly because I *was* afraid of you, partly because my fear was too complex to talk about." There follows a detailed analysis of the relationship between this strange father and this strange child, together with a study of his own character, that amounts to a short autobiography. Here and

* In 1924, at the age of 41, Franz Kafka died in a Vienna hospital. His lifelong friend and literary executor, Max Brod, has just published a biographical study entitled, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie*. From its opening chapter we excerpt a passage that seeks in his relationship to his father the origin of certain elements of Kafka's work. Later chapters in Herr Brod's book show how this relationship combined with social, religious and esthetic influences to shape the characteristic Kafkian art. (*Ed.*)



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there the perspective appears to me distorted; facts are found in combination with unwarranted assumptions; from seemingly trivial perceptions there emerges an edifice of almost unfathomable complexity; and in the end the whole structure explicitly turns on its own axis, seems at once to refute itself and yet to remain valid. In conclusion Kafka makes the father himself speak, as if in reply:

"While I openly and sincerely attribute the sole blame to you, you try to outdo yourself in 'cleverness' and 'tenderness' by acquitting me of all blame. Of course your success in this is purely illusory (you do not want more) and, despite your phrases about 'being' and 'nature,' 'contradiction' and 'helplessness,' it can be read between the lines that I was the real aggressor, while you acted purely in self-defense. You really should be satisfied with the results of your disingenuousness, for you have succeeded in proving three things: first that you are innocent, second that I am guilty, and third that out of pure magnanimity you are prepared, not only to pardon me, but what is at once more and less, to prove, and yourself to believe, that I, contrary of course to the actual truth of the matter, am also innocent. That might have been enough for you, but you go still further. You make up your mind to live entirely at my expense. I admit that we fight one another, but there are two kinds of combat. The chivalrous sort, in which two independent opponents measure their strength, in which each exists for himself, loses for himself and wins for himself. And the sort waged by an insect, which not only stings, but also sucks blood to preserve its own life. That is in the character of the true professional soldier, which is what you are. You are unfit for life; but to make things comfortable and easy for yourself and to spare yourself any self-reproach, you prove that I have robbed you of all your fitness for life and put it in my pocket." (These remarks cast considerable light on the genesis of Franz Kafka's "insect story," *Metamorphosis*, and also on *The Judgment*.)

The central theme of the whole letter can be summed up in the following formula: the son's weakness as compared to the father's arrogant strength. Yet, Kafka was aware that the contradictions were not as sharp and simple as the letter makes out. This awareness, inevitable in a work of Kafka's, runs through the entire text, becoming most pronounced in the concluding words, which are the most conciliatory in the entire piece:

"Living facts cannot of course fit together like the demonstrations in my letter; life is more than a Chinese puzzle; but with the correction resulting from this fact—a correction which I cannot and have no wish to execute in detail—I believe that something very

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close to the truth will have been achieved. This should have a soothing effect on the two of us and make both life and death easier."

With this reservation, the contradiction between the two characters is sharply delineated. The letter stresses the difference in the heredity of the two families from which Franz Kafka sprang: the shy, eccentric Löwys on his mother's side, and the strong, realistic Kafkas. "Compare the two of us: I, to oversimplify, a Löwy with something of the Kafka at the base, which however does not express itself in the Kafka will to life, business, conquest. . . . You, on the other hand, a real Kafka, as to strength, health, appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-reliance, endurance, presence of mind, knowledge of people, a certain *largesse* and, of course, all the faults and weaknesses belonging to your very virtues; weaknesses that are brought out by your changing moods and sometimes by your temper." To this compare the qualities which Franz (in another work) describes as his heritage from his mother's family: "Definance, sensitivity, sense of justice, restlessness."

Toward the end of the letter, Kafka, in speaking of his vain attempt to get married, again paints an animated portrait of his father. "The most important obstacle to my marriage," he writes, "is the ineradicable conviction that the support and conduct of a family require everything that I have recognized in you, the good and the bad together, as you organically combine them: strength and arrogance; health and a certain immoderation; eloquence and unwillingness to listen; self-confidence and contempt for the abilities of others; power over men and an inclination to tyranny; knowledge of people and mistrust toward most. Not to mention such unmixed virtues as diligence, endurance, presence of mind, fearlessness. Such are your qualities—mine by comparison seem next to nothing. Could I, thus equipped, venture into wedlock, when I saw that even you had to struggle hard in your marriage and were positively deficient in your relations with your children? Of course I did not ask myself this question so explicitly; otherwise my common sense would have shown me men quite different from you (Uncle R. for instance), who had married and at least not collapsed under the strain—a considerable accomplishment, that would have been plenty for me. But I did not ask this question, I *experienced* it from childhood on. I examined myself not only in reference to marriage, but in my relation to every trifling matter. Everywhere you convinced me of my incapacity, both by your example and by your training (as I have attempted to describe it). And what was true in connection with trifles could not help but apply to the greatest step of all: marriage."

Here it seems impossible to deny the applicability to Kafka's

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case of Freud's theories of the subconscious. And yet this interpretation seems too facile. For one thing Franz Kafka himself was thoroughly familiar with these theories and never regarded them as anything more than a very approximate, rough picture of things. He found that they did not do justice to details or, what is more, to the essence of the conflict. In the following pages I shall attempt a different interpretation of the facts, by adducing the example of Kleist. For the present, however, it must be admitted that Kafka himself, in stating that he had not explicitly, or "in ordinary thinking," formulated his attitude toward his father's superiority, but had "experienced it from childhood on," seems to confirm the psycho-analytical point of view. So do his remarks on his father's "methods of training"—amplified in numerous diary entries dealing with his "miscarried education"; and his letters on pedagogy, based on Swift's thesis that "children should be brought up outside of the family, not by their parents."

The greater part of the letter, in fact, is devoted to his father's type of "training." "I was a timid child," says Kafka. "However, I was assuredly headstrong, as children are; it is true that my mother spoiled me, but I cannot believe that I was more intractable than the average. I can't help thinking that a friendly word, a guiding hand, a gentle glance would have obtained any results desired. At bottom you are a kindly, soft-hearted person (the following does not contradict this; I am speaking only of the outward form in which you affected the child); but it is not every child who has the endurance and the courage to keep on searching until he finds kindness. In your dealings with a child, you could not help but be your own violent, noisy, hot-tempered self; as a matter of fact you thought your methods calculated to produce a strong, courageous boy."

His father's unfavorable judgments regarding Franz's recreations, his friends, his whole manner of being and acting, were an intolerable burden to him; they caused him to despise himself. Yet the father did not always adhere to his own judgments and rules, and this very lack of logic seemed to the son in retrospect a sign of his untrammeled vitality, his integrity of will. "By your own unaided strength you had worked yourself up so high that you had unlimited confidence in your opinions . . . in your easy chair you ruled the world. Your opinion was correct, and every other was crazy, hysterical, *meshugge,* abnormal. Your self-confidence was so great that you could be inconsistent without ceasing to be right. Sometimes you had no opinion at all in a certain matter, and then all opinions that were possible on the subject had without exception to be wrong. For instance you might curse at the Czechs, then at the Germans, then at the Jews,

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not for any particular qualities but for everything at once, and in the end there was no one left but you. For me you became imbued with the mysterious something that is proper to all tyrants whose right is based not on thought, but on their own person."

Here we might recall the prominent rôle played in Kafka's works not only by the concept of human dignity or democracy, but also by the principle of authority (see *The Trial, The Castle,* and all the stories and fragments that make up *The Great Wall of China.*)

Why did Kafka need his father? Or, more correctly, why was he unable to free himself from his father despite his critical attitude toward him; why did he not, like so many children, build a protective wall between himself and his parent? Or rather, since he actually did create such a barrier and in later years almost ceased to speak to his father: why did he suffer so deeply from the coldness between them? Must he not have known that between characters so diverse as himself and his father an intimate relationship was simply impossible? Franz in any case was able to understand his father; he was more than fair in his loving admiration of him—but the father by his very nature, and of course without any blame, as the letter repeatedly emphasizes, was hopelessly closed to any understanding of his son's peculiar character. Even in my friend's lifetime, when I had no knowledge of his diaries, I realized how deeply this wounded him, but it was vainly that I tried to convince him how foolish he was in overestimating his father and belittling himself. The swarm of arguments on which Kafka based his case (when he did not, as frequently happened, prefer to say nothing) actually did succeed in shaking me for the moment.

The life and death of all his own aims and desires—says Kafka in the letter—depended on his father's judgment (see *The Judgment*). He writes: "My courage, decision, confidence, joy in a thing did not endure if you were opposed to it, or if your opposition could even be surmised; and I surmised it in almost everything I did . . . In your presence I developed a halting, stuttering speech—you are an excellent speaker as long as you are speaking of the things that interest you—but even my halting speech was too much for you, and ultimately I stopped talking altogether, at first for spite, and then because I could neither talk nor think in your presence. And since you were my actual teacher, this affected everything in my life." Here we encounter an interesting parallel: Kleist is also said to have stuttered. Kafka's stuttering, indeed, can only be applied to his relations with his father; otherwise, whenever he opened his mouth at all, he spoke freely, easily, elegantly, often humorously, with a charming, overflowing fantasy and disarming naturalness.

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According to the letter, the results of his "training" (and here Kafka offers his own commentary to the final words of *The Trial*) was as follows: "I had lost my self-confidence in your presence, and exchanged for it a boundless consciousness of guilt. It was this sense of guilt that I had in mind when I aptly wrote of a certain person: 'He is afraid that his shame will survive him'."—Kafka then construes his further life as a series of attempts to break away from his father, to attain to regions removed from his father's influence. It is remarkable that Kafka, who in his judgment of literary works absolutely rejects all lifeless, abstract "constructions," should in this case himself employ "constructions" which, along with correct elements, contain many half truths and distortions. Thus, for example, he attempts to classify his entire literary work under the general heading of "attempt at flight from his father," as if his love of artistry, his creative pleasure had no existence of their own. Those who knew him were, of course, far from accepting the simple picture of a man tortured by a father complex. They saw in him a man inspired by form, creative will and ability, thirst for knowledge, a love of life and humanity. A component, though no more than a component, was that aspect of his literary work which the letter so movingly describes: "You were the subject of my books," he writes. "In them I poured out the sorrows that I could not pour out on your breast. My writing has been a purposely drawn-out parting from you. But though this parting was forced by you, its direction was determined by me."

In the letter Kafka views other aspects of his life as an attempted flight: family, friendship, Judaism, profession, and ultimately his two attempts to marry: "My self-evaluation depended far more on you than on anything else,—more even than on outward success. . . . Where I lived I was despised, ill-judged, defeated, and though I exerted myself to the utmost to escape, I did not succeed, for with rare exceptions that was beyond my powers."

His remarks on Judaism, as a flight from his father's power may here be mentioned, because they cast an important light on his childhood and also on his later religious development. "I found just as little salvation in Judaism. Here, other things being equal, a salvation was conceivable. Even more likely was the possibility that we should find one another in Judaism or use it as a starting point for further relations. But what sort of Judaism was it that I received from you? In the course of time I have had some three different attitudes toward it.

"As a child I emulated you in reproaching myself for not going to temple often enough, for not fasting, etc. I thought that I was

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doing an injustice, not to myself but to you, and the consciousness of guilt, which always lurked in readiness, ran through me.

"Later, as a young man, I failed to understand how you, with your pretense of Judaism, could reproach me for not exerting myself (if only for piety, as you put it) in the service of a similar sham. The whole thing, as far as I could see, was a delusion, a joke, not even a joke. Four days in the year you went to temple. When you were there, you were certainly more indifferent than anything else; you patiently ran through the prayers as if they had been a mere formality, and occasionally startled me by your ability to find the place in the prayer book. For the rest, I was permitted—and that was the main thing—to run around wherever I liked. And so I yawned and dozed through many hours there (I think that since then I have never been so bored, except in dancing school) and tried to get as much pleasure as possible out of the few little novelties that occurred, such as when the Ark of the Covenant was opened. This always remined me of the little box that opened at the shooting galleries when you hit a bullseye, except that in the shooting gallery it was something interesting that came out, while here it was always the same old headless dolls. What is more, I was very much afraid there too, not only, as was natural, because of all the people, but also because you once mentioned in passing that I might be called up to the Torah. This possibility kept me trembling for years. Otherwise I was never seriously disturbed in my boredom, except perhaps by my *bar mitzvah,* which, like a meaningless examination, required only a certain amount of memorizing. And then again my attention was attracted by little insignificant events, as when you were called to the Torah and cut a good figure in this function, which I regarded as purely social; or when in the memorial service you remained in the temple while I was sent away. I did not understand this last occurrence, and for a long time it aroused in me the almost unconscious feeling that somethig disreputable was going on.

"That was the temple. At home your religion was if possible even more wretched. It was restricted to Passover, which became more and more of a slapstick comedy, though, to be sure, the influence of your growing children had a good deal to do with that. (Why did you have to give in to this influence? Because you were the cause of it.) This was the faith that was handed down to me. Unless I include your pointing out to me 'the sons of F., the millionaire,' who on the principal holidays came to temple with their father. It seemed to me that the best thing to do with such a heritage was to get rid of it as quickly as possible, and this riddance seemed to me the height of piety.

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"Later I adopted still a different attitude. I came to understand how you could believe that here too I was maliciously betraying you. You had really brought a certain Judaism with you from your little ghetto-like village community. It was not much, and what there was of it dwindled in the city and the army: yet the impressions and memories of youth did constitute a sort of Jewish life. The fact is that you did not have much need for that sort of sustenance, since you came of a powerful stock and were impervious to religious forces when they were not closely bound up with social considerations. Basically the faith which supported your life was your belief in the unquestionable correctness of the opinions of a certain Jewish social class; since these were your own opinions, your faith was your belief in yourself. This was enough Judaism for you, but for handing down to a child, it was too little; in the transmission it disintegrated entirely. All that remained were a few untransmittable childhood impressions and your much feared person. It was impossible to persuade a child, whose very fright had made him a sharp observer, that the meaningless forms you went through in the name of Judaism, with an indifference suiting their insignificance, could have any higher meaning. For you they held meaning as little memories of former times, and that was why you wanted to pass them on to me; but since even for yourself they had no independent value, you were able to do this only by arguments and threats. This method was, of course, unsuccessful, and since you did not understand your weak position, you became furious at me for my apparent recalcitrance.

"All this is no isolated phenomenon; the same was true of a large part of this transitional generation of Jews, who emigrated from the country, where a relative piety still prevailed, to the city. It was more or less inevitable, but it added one more asperity to our already difficult relationship. I am quite willing for you to believe—as I do—that you are guiltless in this respect; but you should explain your guiltlessness by your character and the nature of the times, not by outward circumstances. You should not say you had too much work and worry to permit you to occupy yourself with such matters. For in this way you turn your indubitable guiltlessness into an unjust reproach to others—a reproach that is very easily countered. For we are here concerned not with any instruction that you should have given your children, but with an exemplary life; if your Jewishness had been stronger, your example would also have been more cogent; this is self-evident and again no reproach, but only a defense against *your* reproaches.

"I have received a certain tardy confirmation of this estimate of your Judaism through your conduct in the last few years, when it

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seemed to you that I was busying myself more with Jewish matters. You have always been prejudiced in advance against my occupations, and even more so against my enthusiasms. Here you showed the same distaste; yet in this case you might have been expected to make a slight exception, for this was Jewishness of your Jewishness and hence offered the possibility of a new relationship between us. I do not deny that if you had taken any interest in these matters, they might have aroused my suspicions by that very fact; I do not claim to be any better than you in this respect. But the matter never came to a test. Through me Jewishness became repulsive to you, Jewish books unreadable. They 'disgusted you.' This may have been because you insisted that the Judaism you taught me during my childhood was the only true sort and that beyond that there was nothing. But it is hardly thinkable that you should have insisted on this point. In this case your 'disgust' (let us forget for the moment that it was immediately directed not against things Jewish but against my person) could only signify that you unconsciously recognized the weakness of your Jewishness and of my Jewish training, but, not wishing to be reminded of this, replied to all reminders with open hatred. Anyway, the negative importance you attached to my new Jewishness was much exaggerated; in the first place it bore your curse within itself, and moreover, since this sort of development depends largely on the nature of one's relation to one's fellow men, it was in my case doomed to failure."

Compared to Kafka's father, his mother, seen "in the kaleidoscope of childhood," seems "a paragon of reason." Her son indeed deplores her lack of independence toward his father, but also understands it. He understands her love for her husband and realizes that opposition to his will would have been impossible. Yet he resented the fact that his parents formed a sort of unit, a common front against their son, which his mother dared abandon only in secret. This resentment has left a profound trace in Kafka's work. See *Das Ehepaar* (*The Married Couple*), which from this point of view is one of Kafka's most revealing works.

The Kafka household in many ways resembled the Prousts' (see Léon Pierre-Quint: *Marcel Proust, sa vie, son oeuvre*: "His father left home early in the morning and rarely saw his son." His mother, by contrast, "was gentle and kind . . . she watched over him with the utmost care, excusing in advance his fantasies and the careless habits in which he indulged.") If we study the common elements in the relations of Proust and Kafka to their parents we may perhaps begin to understand the similarity in outlook and style of two writers who,

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though they lived at the same time, never heard of one another. Their special precision in description, their love of detail, their meticulousness; the obsession of both with the family circle, a certain similarity in their racial make-up (Proust's mother was a Jewess) and even in their outward lives—all this encourages comparison, though of course the difference between Proust's cosmopolitan environment and Kafka's bourgeois Prague led to important divergences in their work.

In dealing with cases such as Proust, Kleist and Kafka who, as long as they lived, never tore themselves away from the domination of family and family tradition, psychoanalysis sets up its theory of subconscious erotic attachment to the mother and subconscious hatred for the father. But there is also a simpler explanation for this attachment to the infantile (though it does not entirely exclude the psychoanalytical). This explanation is that the parents are the first problem confronting the child, the first resistance he has to deal with; his conflict with them is the model of all his life struggles to come.

The seriousness and intensity with which this first conflict (with parents and family) may be felt is shown by the career of a typically infantile poet: Kleist *. All his life Kleist was haunted by the thought: what will my family (the extended family circle) say to my omissions and commissions? Will they trust me? There was bound to be an unbridgeable gulf between Kleist's old Prussian family, which saw fame exclusively in the spheres of warfare and government, and the delicate, emotional, erratic poet. Kleist was literally terrorized by the most elevated ethical principles. He knew that in the eyes of his family his verses and dramas were not much better than a base and contemptible debauch. Kafka read Kleist's letters with especial sympathy, underlined passages telling how Kleist's family regarded the poet as "an utterly useless members of human society, unworthy of further consideration." With silent irony Kafka noted in the margin that on Kleist's hundredth birthday the family had laid a wreath on the poet's grave with the words: "To the best of our race."

It has often been noted that Franz Kafka's works, especially in their prose style, show a considerable resemblance to Kleist. This resemblance cannot be attributed to mere influence. To my knowledge, no one has yet pointed out the similarity in their basic attitudes. This attitude is, in the truest sense of the word, "incarnate" in both men. Even their portraits show a resemblance, at least in the boyishness

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* Heinrich von Kleist, born 1777, committed suicide 1811. Most important of German Romantic dramatists. Chief dramas are *Penthesilea, Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, Der Zerbrochene Krug, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg.* It is his long short story, *Michael Kohlhaas,* which most directly influenced Kafka, both in his prose style and his treatment of the problem of justice. (*tr.*)

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and purity of their features. In Kafka's work the central theme is again responsibility toward the family. This is the key to stories such as *Metamorphosis, The Judgment, Der Heizer* (*The Stoker*) and many details in other works. Also a special way of using symbols that are utterly realistic, is common to both writers. It is not really so far from Kleist's virgin who, before the eyes of her aristocratic family, is transformed into a pregnant and dishonored woman, to the young man who in the bosom of his family is mysteriously transformed into a contemptible insect. (*Metamorphosis.*)

In both writers there is the same attachment to family and childhood experiences. In both there is the unconscious survival of an austere tradition (in Kleist's case a Prussian tradition refreshed by Kantianism, in Kafka's the Jewish ethics of justice, reawakened by later Jewish studies.) In connection with the childlike appearance of Kleist, I might mention one of Kafka's utterances to me: "I shall never experience the age of manhood," he said. "From a child I shall grow directly into a white-haired old man." He often pointed out, even in his diaries, that people thought him very young.

In both men we find an occasional distrust toward the sexual function. Finally, both made excessive demands on themselves, as if they owed it to their family to prove that they were not good-for-nothings. This explains the dislike for every kind of "dependence," that tormented Kafka even in the hungry Berlin winter of 1923 (the last year of his life), when he received packages of food from his parents in Prague.

Finally, Kafka's highest ideal is nowhere better expressed than in Kleist's longing words: "To cultivate a field, to plant a tree, to beget a child." Yet the careers of both men were far removed from the coveted peasant simplicity. The analogy can even be pursued in studying their literary form, though of course we must bear in mind that Kafka consciously learned from Kleist's style. Both writers are remarkable for a sort of fantastic invention that seems to spring from the child's inclination to enchant everything he plays with. These two men actually did know "the way back"—and often traveled it. Their crystal-clear style, their realistic treatment of detail are a compensation, a defense against their childlike dreams. For both of them describe with the clearest, simplest, most definite words they can possibly find, the most secret, dark and unresolvable things.

(*translated by* RALPH MANHEIM)

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# ASLEEP A KING

## Eleanor Clark

He felt her hands on his face, cool, the fingers drawing slowly together to drive out the sun. Is this the girl I am going to marry, my nursebride? Should I speak? Ssh, ssh. . . . There is not going to be any morning this morning. These white fingers have driven away the sun, by quiet, everything is going to be all right. Now they had drawn all together, a cloud, a shroud, he could not even remember the white face of his girl. Only the softness, release from pain, the virgin pallor of the hospital. Be still. This is the way it was always meant to be . . .

"Mark!"

Hold it, cling to it. Hide your eyes. . . .

Gone. That was last year. And this is life again, this leadenness, one of a million mornings weighting each other down. No whiteness, no dream. Mother is there, an aging woman who has slept badly and has too much washing to do. Soon she will come and stand in the door, half dressed and messed with sleep—always a loose strand of hair in a vague grey line across her face, like a sign—and scold. The sun is up, stabs at the window-sill, creeps closer and at last pricks your wrist that is hanging almost to the floor. There is no fighting it away now: it crawls on comfortably as if finding itself at home, shows up bare patches in the rag carpet and the few brass knobs left on the bureau. And as if from a wound sleep drains away from you, leaving you weak and hating, face upturned to the day.

David, in the same room, has nothing to get up for and so is able to hang on to his sleep, a piggish affair. His violin lies upside down in the chair beside him, he is dreaming, probably, of the girls in Honolulu. God take away this day and every other jackass morning. Let me sleep.

"Get up! What are you thinking of? It's nearly seven."

"I'm coming."

He pulled himself up, loathing himself and his brown wrist in the sun and the sun because he would have to go out in it. Mark



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Bradley is a joke, is nobody. At last was on his feet. There was relief in that. Sleep has an idiotic, disreputable look when you have recovered from it, the soiled and hopeless look of David lying there like an animal rolled up in a ball for winter and no good to anyone.

It is better, they say, to be alive.

He looked again at his brother, the loose round lips bloated a little with each outward breath, cheeks hanging full and sodden, the short chin cupped gently in the pillow as if for protection. *He* was to have been the promising one in the family, a musician, but that petered out. Then off into the wide world, where he was to find a fortune or at least a job, and fell for an army poster in New York. Now he was back for good and it seemed there was no use going away. Sometimes in Spring he got work on the local road gang, sometimes played for dances in the Town Hall as he had as a child. It was awful to hear him, Mark thought, wringing the sentimental tunes out with a bitter twang. . . .

"Hey Dave."

He grunted, pulled in a little more like a turtle.

Mark let him alone, dressed quickly and joined his mother.

"You won't be here so many more days," she said, pushing breakfast toward him. "How many is it? Let me see, four, five six . . . I'd ought to give you something special I suppose." She stood hesitantly. There were moments like this when her nose seemed more thinly bridged than usual and her forehead particularly square and high. It made him want to say something special, as she had wanted to cook him a special kind of egg, but he could not think of anything. "This is all right," he said.

"Yes. Six, that's it. Friday, Saturday, Sunday. . . . " She sat down beside him and fidgetted with an empty coffee cup. On ordinary days she would have been at the tubs by now but it would seem unfriendly when there were so few days left. She was treating him like a guest already: the thought made him feel sick suddenly, and helpless, as he had waking. "My," she said, "I don't know where the time flies to . . . " and as if time were a family commodity that could be devoured by one member, she rose abruptly and went in to annoy David out of his animal sleep. "You're no good," Mark heard. "All you want is to eat and drink and have somebody slave for you from morning to night. . . . "

Through the branches of an antique elm he could see the small white house he would be living in. He was going to move his life across the road: already odd bits of furniture had been lugged there from his mother's attic, all the paraphernalia installed, there was nothing more to decide. He would sit opposite Joan, the new Mrs. Bradley,

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"the young one," as if the house had always been there for the two of them. And over here his mother, perhaps, would begin to think of grandchildren.

"I suppose Joan will be over today."

It was not a grandmotherly voice. He saw the lines spreading fanwise from her eyes and one hair sprouting in a tough grey curl from the mole on her cheek. He wished she would get rid of it.

"I don't know," he said.

"You don't know? Why, I should think. . . . "

He cut her off. "No, I don't know."

"Well, it's none of my business I suppose, but I should think she'd want to let you alone for a little while now. You'll be seeing plenty of each other"—she laughed, almost harshly, but there was a downward note at the end of it—"in the years to come." She turned her back to him and began hauling Mrs. Aldington's sheets out onto the floor. "One, two, three . . . Goodness! Don't she use *anything* but sheets?"

The sun was already high over the Episcopal steeple: time to behave like a real somebody, time to be at work. He pushed the lace curtains back and stared at the village, seeing it newly this morning, as if he had lost his hearing or sense of touch. They were loading hay on the hill opposite, very peacefully, he could hear them shouting at the horses now and then and one man walked away from the wagon and left his shirt under a tree. Above, in a peach orchard, a small boy climbed a tree, the high branches looping under his weight, and felt the fruit. Someone called from the house: he jumped down quickly, ran a few yards, then fell into a sudden saunter, his hands in his pockets. At the corner on the state road one of the city spinsters came trotting down her path, fussing with a sun-bonnet, and began a conversation with the gardener. She squatted cumbersomely to the ground, her hand held out, slowly raised herself—as if expressing the growth of a flower—shook her finger several times and pounced back into the house. At the gas-stand next to Mark's new home a dog twirled in zig-zags trying to bite its tail, finally gave it up and sank disconsolately into a little ball in the sun.

"What? You still here? Are you crazy?"

"I'm going."

He went out, not saying goodbye or looking at his mother again, feeling her brewing some kind of accusation against him in the steam that rose up around her from the tubs. Now her face would be taking on that scrubbing look, the corners of her mouth contracting with each downward motion, fixing each time an expression almost of hatred that relaxed again and re-formed with the thrust down of her

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shoulders. Does Mrs. Aldington use nothing but sheets? Who am I? What am I using my legs for? What have I got to do with all the people in this town? As his car turned into the road he had an impulse to stop, run back quickly, and bury himself miles deep in his bed.

The impulse came again during the morning, grew, as he piled groceries into HURLBUT'S CRUISING STORE, to something like a conviction. His motions seemed useless and strange, the brilliance and urgency of the sun exasperated him, as if he had been up all night. He felt it beating on his bronzed neck and arms but he was stiff against it, he could not think clearly about anything but sleep. And it had been the same in other years, in his teens: June was too much for him. Everything heaving into flower; girls swinging along the state road hand in hand; women dragging their bright colours out of trunks and rushing somewhere, anywhere, to meet. There on the porch steps at mail time: Where have we been all this time? Peaches! the first of the season. We'll have a party Saturday and ask everyone in town. Even the old-time old maid opens her purse a little wider on a day like this. And the sun throbs more and more until noon comes like a trumpet over the hills. Everyone but Mark, it seemed, had some secret understanding with the month of June.

He went on stacking groceries in the truck.

"Take this!"

It was Jake Hurlbut speaking.

Mark looked up as from a hidden vice and saw his employer—his employer's son—rolling like a mountain out the back door, a case of canned food leaning on his chest. Where did he get all that power? Is it just from eating? He was six feet four and walked with huge tough-muscled majesty, his girth bulging before him like an overstuffed sack. He had pale chicken-down hair and once in a long while —for girls only— the moist pink smile of a baby. They had been in school and high-school together.

Mark took the case.

"And hurry up there. We got to get going."

"O.K."

He would have liked to get tough with Jake, he dreamed of it sometimes, but there was no use. Jake had everything well in hand. There were plenty of boys hanging around the gas-stand who would have jumped at Mark's job, plenty more on the road gang. They were almost in awe of Mark because he worked at the store. Nobody could tell Jake what to do. Even his father was dependent on him since they moved into the new building. He was still longing for the old store, the little one-room thing with a stove in the middle, and couldn't get

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used to the new place. He had to ask Jake where things were kept. He was sure the Hurlbut family was on the way to bankruptcy and hell. But Jake had his eye on the times and knew better: he expanded, catered to the city people, added a restaurant. He was making a lot of money and could have fired Mark with no trouble at all.

"Get that meat in out of the sun!"

Mark put the meat in the truck.

"Love, huh?" It sounded threatening.

"What?"

"Tweet tweet," said Jake, sly, ponderous. He laughed—a powerful bass—twirled grandly on his heel and rolled back into the store.

Mark looked at the hills: hay, sun, peach orchards, men at work. What for? What was he working for? It seemed to him that at some time he must have had a dream for himself but he could not remember it. There must have been some picture of what he would become, very successful and definite, so that people would have said There goes Mark Bradley the way they said There's HURLBUT'S CRUISING STORE. He would have made money, made love, become a Selectman perhaps. Would have bought fine clothes for his girl. . . . He must have imagined at some time how all that was done, and now it had drifted off and turned to nothing, like Dave's music and Dave's voyages. Perhaps he had dreamed of getting out of that town—yes, he had watched the trains at Millboro, he remembered *that,* had felt their gallop in his blood and said: in another year, two years—and then had seen his brother come back jobless, full of smutty stories, sallow-eyed. David playing in the Town Hall just like when he was a child, only he was not a child any more, he was not anything.

"Hey! Mark!"

Another load. He hauled it in and sat down beside it.

He thought: there'll be a million other loads before I'm dead. He began counting them dizzily—so many cases a day, days in a month—until he felt squashed under an eternity of cans. And what for? Eighteen a week. *What for?* He thought of Jake, for a moment imagined himself as Jake: portly, paunchy, his power sitting heavy on him like a big meal, the little fat pink corners of his mouth going cruel over a question of credit, his massive cheeks twisting crookedly at a dirty joke. No dream, that, nothing you'd want to be if you could, and you can't, ever. *You're* going to spend the rest of your life piling canned food, thousands of tons of it, into Jake's CRUISING STORE, and if you asked for a two-dollar raise Jake would simply . . . smile. Everyone would: Mark Bradley is nobody, a pale-faced tin-can-stacker, he almost doesn't exist.

"Hey! Come out of the clouds for Christ's sake!"

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He came out of the clouds.

Mark Bradley is nobody, look at him, he's never even slept with his girl.

The truck was ready now, full of fancy things for the fancy people and bread-and-bean stuff for the rest. Mark sat down again. He should have gone in and helped at the counter but he felt tired already: there are so many jokes when a boy is about to be married. The postmaster whistles love tunes from his little cage, his assistant, aged forty, pats the bun that lies like a baby mouse at the back of her neck and breathes rapidly, thinking of love. Even old Jed Hurlbut is able to shuffle off his imminent ruin, and wink. Mark, it seems, is the only one that cannot catch the spirit of his own love affair. He sits deep back in the shadow of canned goods and bites his nails. Watches the hub-bub as through the wrong end of a telescope and wishes, yes, almost, that he were dead. But that is a shameful thought. It is better to think of killing someone else, like Jake. *That* picture brings a certain feeling of freedom: the face grows and grows, is spread all over between you and the sky, leering, comes closer so that your lungs ache, closer, until you are staring straight into the voluminous fat folds of his neck: then suddenly, plop! you are free. You have killed it. There is nothing there.

"Oh Padre! What an old sinner you are!"

He heard the minister laugh. Come out of the clouds.

"Yes sir! I think people like you ought to be exterminated. . . . "

"Oh!" Mrs. Aldington shrieked in outrage, one arm raised and a coy twist in her eye. Does she use nothing but. . . . Mrs. Aldington was one of the best members of the Episcopal Church and had done more than anyone, Father Williams had said, to raise money for the organ fund. Through the back of the truck Mark saw the minister leaning on the window of her well-polished car. His chubbiness and inverted collar gave him the look of a big pet animal, as if there might be a chain clipped on at the back of his neck, but he was a great success. He had fine robust features and the reputation of being splendid with old ladies as well as middle-aged. "Well I *will* say *this*," said Mrs. Aldington. "If I were *dictator*. . . . "

"Oh go on with your dictators! People like you. . . . "

"Now Padre!"

As Father Williams turned away they noticed Mark, waved, and Mrs. Aldington called out in a shrill commanding key—he had heard that voice often while mowing her lawn—"Your new house is sweet! Just as sweet as it can be!"

Mark smiled.

"He's got a fine girl too," Father Williams said.

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"Oh yes I know Joan, and you must both come up to see me some time, will you?" This was her after-church manner. Mark had seen it in operation for years. "I'd simply love it."

She backed out into the state road and then there was nothing for Mark to look at there but his own car, equally well polished and new only not paid for yet. There were fourteen months to go. He closed his eyes and began figuring again, in the crazy sick way that had come over him lately: dollars in a week, weeks in fourteen months, cans on a shelf in a year. . . . The sun was already at its highest, slapping down on the truck roof, making his pale curls itch and dampen at the roots. The face of Jake rose up, wilted, there was nothing to it after all. Father Williams was more important and Mark would put a dime in the collection plate on Sunday as he always had. Perhaps when he was married they would have to put in a dime apiece. Do come to see me, will you? I'm not a dictator, I only talk that way. He thought, if only something would happen, if something would knock the damn figures out of his head, it might be nice to go calling on Mrs. Aldington in his new car.

Jake came out at last, his arms full of butter.

"All set?"

"Yes."

"You took your time all right."

But he couldn't manage to be ugly about it. Summer had come to the store, all the best people were there feeling the fruit, and Jake was a young man still. He smiled, the handsome slabs of his face going pudgy with the heat, his wet blue eyes—not piggish as Mark had been picturing them—wide open. Where did he get all that power? Won't he melt one of these days? Not yet anyway. There was still enough of him to need a special steering-gear with a hinge so he could get in behind it. He hoisted himself up like an aviator, clicked the wheel down against his belly, and was off. The pencil teetered over his ear and a bit of saliva leaked down into the crevice beneath his chin. He began a long story about a girl. . . . Mark gave himself up to his sickness and to his watery vision of Joan and her white hands in a white hospital. The truck rolled on, huge and methodical, as if devouring the countryside, and people ran to meet it innocently at their picket gates.

She was waiting for him in the new house after work, fixing flowers in a cheap vase, blue and yellow. He watched her through the window. The late sun was striking in shafts from the other side, making her look like a five-and-ten Catholic saint. The picture was right in other ways too: her hair, pale like his but pulled back straight and

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silken as a nun's must be—she prinked at it now and then but without excitement—her thinness and the strange tint and glow of her skin. She placed the flowers with a certain tender abstraction, as you would arrange a child's clothes before church. That morning she had said goodbye to the hospital and now for six days would be getting ready for Mark. The thought frightened him, he dug his nails into his palm, watching her. At last forced himself quiet and went in.

"Hello."

She waited, smiling, still shy of him.

"I wasn't sure you'd come over."

"I said I would, didn't I?"

That was the nearest she had ever come to flirtation, the shy upward look, a hint of breathlessness in her speech. That was what had brought him to life again in the hospital, and now a different *active* kind of living was expected of him. The right remark, a kiss, a young man is not supposed to be tired before the sun has set. *She* was not tired, had no trouble being alive, had never hidden a pistol in her bureau drawer. She had brought armfuls of packages from Millboro and in solemn rapture was pulling their brown paper off, like a child. And when all her toys were hung up around her that would be her house, to live in, as if it could never be torn down. "Look!" she said. "They're for the kitchen, they were only fifty cents!" Curtains, flimsy yellow things, fit for dolls. "Do you like them? Do you think they'll be all right?" All the depths of her grey eyes were alive over them: he tried hard to get in there with her, in her doll's house. "Yes, they're fine"—that was not enough: he went on with the effort, wanting to get himself into words, quickly—"Yellow's nice in a kitchen." "That's what I thought, but I couldn't get this yellow. . . . " She held up a screeching red double-boiler. "The kitchen will look like a . . . "

"Snap-dragon," he said.

"You're the snap-dragon."

"No I'm not! No!"

There was too much pain in his voice. He looked away, ashamed. Her face went still suddenly and she took a step toward him, like an angel in one of those cheap photographs, the brilliant red pots dangling in her hands. "What's the matter?"

"Listen, I ought to tell you things. . . . "

He stood at the window, the sun a flare on his back and his face deep-lined in shadow. He watched his mother's house across the road, as if some secret could be torn out of it by looking, that would make him well. Saw the dark kitchen curtains belly and float back as she passed and the sheets waving a little like weird birds over the deep-

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shadowed lawn. His thought were the same, strange, like birds, there was nothing there for him to catch.

"I never told you about my father, did I?"

"No."

"He got killed."

"Yes, I know."

" . . . in a corn-cutter up at Aldingtons'. Gangrene."

"Aldingtons'?" She had worked there too, before she was a nurse.

"Funny, isn't it?" He spoke bitterly but it was not against the Aldingtons: it had been no one's fault, an accident. "Yes, they used to run a big farm up there, for fun I guess. But that isn't what I wanted to say. . . . "

She was leaning toward him, quiet, waiting.

"After that mother used to, I wanted. . . . "

Now she was coming out, the woman who was getting old—he watched her heavy step and the sagging grey line of her hair—to take the sheets in out of the dew. He saw the quick irritated twist of her fingers plucking the pins from the line. Tiredness came over him again, the need for sleep, somehow he must strike it down or he would drown in it. Joan had put the bright pots out of sight, as if they were unsuitable, and was waiting for him to speak. She watched him solemnly, the doll-nun, but the pressure of her shoulder was alive, full-beating. He felt as if some-one had wakened in the room while his head was turned. But he went on looking across the road where the woman had gathered the last sheets, and heavily, almost with anger, was carrying them to her kitchen door.

"I don't know what you want from me," he said sharply.

She seemed not to have heard: "You were going to tell me something else."

"I'll never make any money, if that's it." He waved vaguely toward the other house, the empty clothes-line. "I never did anyone any good, I never will." She had begun to tidy up, folding the torn brown paper, piling the unopened packages in a chair. His voice rose shrill and accusing, like his mother's he thought suddenly. "Why don't you marry Jake Hurlbut? Why in Christ's name couldn't you have picked a *man*?"

Her lips opened in that shy doll-smile, frightened: "It wasn't money and Jake's too fat."

"Well?"

"Well, I . . . "

"You love me, I suppose."

He meant that to be deeply sarcastic but it turned out a simple question.

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"Yes," she said.

Darkness was creeping up, there was nothing left of the picture-card but a smoke of rose in the East, small and regular as if from an imaginary farm house on the hill. Mrs. Bradley had switched on the kitchen lamp, drawing in suddenly, away from them and from the dark outside, into her own little circle of light. He reached through the dusk for Joan, turned her face up, and his thought cleared slowly and took form: *This is the beginning of Mark Bradley, a man.* He felt the curves of her body against his like the wonderful fitness of sleep, but to be gloried in, awake! Saw over her shoulder their home, their own windows, a heap of packages on a chair.

"I'll be somebody," he said.

"It doesn't matter."

"I want to buy things for you. Clothes and things. I will!"

"Mark. . . . "

She was crying, the tears wet his cheek and startled him. He remembered her always as she had been in the hospital—white, silent, bringing him back gently from his ether dreams—had not thought of her as someone who could cry. "Don't cry, darling. We'll have some money some day, we'll have everything. . . . "

"It isn't that."

He went on caressing her pale hair, reverently, feeling also a desire to cry, and the dark fell around them clean and clear, like snow. On the far hill the men had left their haying, there was nothing to be seen there but the young peach trees hovering in the dark like moths. Around the green the lights were coming on, the spinster's house on the corner ablaze behind her elms, because she had the money perhaps or out of fear. A few birds sang, nervous, not finding their young, at last fluttered to silence and sleep. They were alone. This was their own home, their love. He pressed her more closely, laughing a little.

"Mark listen. . . . " She tried to pull away.

He held her, laughing: "What?"

"I'm not"—she got her arms free and stood back—"the way you think." Her face was very narrow and white in the grey light, her arms hung listless.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not. . . . "

She waited a long time before saying it, looking straight at him but distantly, her eyes heavy as if she were going to be sick. Even before she spoke he backed away, knowing, sensing the fact rise in the dark between them like a poison. She was twenty, he told himself,

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twenty years old, as if that figure were somehow evil. Now she was speaking, making it simple and very clear. He felt strangled by the purity of her face and kept his eyes down. It was three years ago when she was taking care of two children in Millboro: their father, the librarian, a much-loved citizen. She couldn't help it, she had simply put up with it, and after six months she had enough money to become a nurse. It didn't matter so much. . . .

"I don't know what you mean."

"I wanted to tell you before. . . . "

The dark was all up around him, trapping him. He saw the white line of her face and her lips parted a little, but he saw in messy fragments, dreamlike, nothing was clear. And then he realized that he had left her and without speaking again had come out on to the road. He began walking, past his mother's house—dinner would be ready—past the Aldingtons' where music drifted out in gusts under the black trees, on through the dark. The picture teased him from the greenish moon-shadows of the road—someone possessing her—but soon he was not thinking of that, only of the tiredness that had come on again, sucking him under. The stick he had been carrying slipped from his fingers and his hands hung empty and loose, he had no grasp even on a little twig of birch. Mark Bradley is nobody, the night said, *is nothing*. He turned back languidly, the rising moon a great orange tropical fruit behind him, and when a young owl screamed from the woods he stiffened like someone leaving his first crime. It seemed hours before he was down again among the village lights, and by then the fatigue had risen over him entirely. His legs shook and under the porch lamp his face was deep-hollowed and vague, like the surface of the moon, free of the trees now and driving up palely into nothing.

Everyone in the store was peeved at Mark. Especially old Jed, because Mrs. Bradley had telephoned at midnight, when he was still wearily going over the accounts, to ask if Mark were there, and after that he had not been able to get back properly into the figures: he had not even found anything wrong with the books. Jake had a better reason. He had to get one of the other boys to help load the truck and at eleven he set off on his rounds alone. It pricked him, aside from being inconvenient on account of the steering-gear, to have to get out himself at every house like an ordinary grocer's boy. His shirt clung with sweat, he cursed Mark and told himself by God a girl was no excuse for such behavior: he could not understand it: himself, he had never stayed out past eleven for a girl except once and then had come home with a rash around his mouth. But at noon

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he found Mark's car drawn up by the side of a back road at the top of a hill, and on the front seat Mark's body. His enormous features wrinkled and went pale, his little blue eyes crawled over the corpse, and from sheer nervousness a tear oozed out and splashed on Mark's fingers on the window.

In ten minutes everyone but Mrs. Bradley knew.

*"Why?"*

" . . . I can't understand it. Horrible!"

"They say she gave him back his ring last week. . . . "

" . . . always a morbid. . . . "

The real talk was in whispers: *"They say. . . . "*

Among the first to hear were Father Williams and Mrs. Aldington. Her car had broken down and the Padre, in his rôle as general shepherd, had come to take her marketing: they were at the store when Jake telephoned. Mrs. Aldington was aghast. "Mark Bradley? *Shot himself?"* Her hand flew to her forehead, she swayed. However after a few minutes she was able to reel back into shape and help the Padre take charge. An ambulance was sent for from Millboro, the doctor and First Selectman called, and so on. It was decided that no less than she and Padre themselves should notify Mrs. Bradley, especially as there was a certain intimacy between the Bradleys and the Aldingtons, but on the way there she had a relapse. "Why *did* he do it, Padre?" she whimpered. "Why I just can't believe it was only yesterday he was looking so happy, just like any normal healthy boy in love. . . . " She went in with her nose very red and a handkerchief wadded in her hand. Father Williams straightened his collar, composed his handsome padded face as for communion, and broke the news.

Mrs. Bradley was at the ironing-board. She said nothing, Her lips were pressed hard together and the lines of her face drawn down, giving her an expression almost of hatred, but her fingers trembled on the iron. After a while the cloth began to burn and sighing a little, as if at the end of another too-long day, she lifted the iron to its rack. Only when they were leaving she spoke, her voice insistent, dead: "Mrs. Aldington, I wonder if you could let me have the money for this week, now. I'd appreciate it. . . . " She motioned with vague resentment toward the laundry-littered room and the bedroom where Mark's body would lie, where not so many hours before he had been sleeping. "Of course. . . . " Mrs. Aldington spoke hurriedly, as if it were a shady deal, scrambled through her purse and furtively handed over the bills: "It's all I have with me. . . . " Mrs. Bradley tucked them carefully in her apron pocket and turned away.

It was not until hours later, staring at the white-covered remains,

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that she wept, saying "Poor Mark, poor Mark . . ." and patting the coverlet continuously, in a kind of trance. Her free right hand lay in her lap, clenched, bitter, and her eyes had the blurred bottomless look of a cheated child. Then the dark began to crawl through the room treacherously, like a thief, and suddenly she was frightened to be alone there with *him*. She went back to the kitchen where David had been walking all afternoon. "Now will you get a job?" He said nothing, back to her, hands in his pockets. She rattled the pans in the sink. "All you want is to drink and . . . " "Christ!" He turned—dishevelled, the loose white lips twisting—but in a moment the anger and energy had drained away, leaving him stooped, flabby, a trifle hurt. "I guess you're right," he said, and went out.

On the other side of the road Joan sat among the unused furniture and the packages, trying to remember. Mark! Stay with me! I have no other life than you. She heard the buzz and rumble of a truck passing and crickets singing beneath their lilac tree. Now he is coming, look, in the corner, out of the shadow, rising: he was only asleep. Love, this is my true self, my arms, my voice. Be silent, listen to my voice, believe in me. This is our own country, here. Here! Reaches his deep-shadowed arms, rising, singing of crickets in the June night, and now blood, look! streams down the sky. *We have been betrayed*. But in the morning she awoke to new sounds, rose and went out from their home, slowly, into the sun.

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# THEATER CHRONICLE

## The Federal Theater Settles Down

THE FEDERAL THEATER is settling down. In two years it has passed from an experiment into an institution, and its first young nervosity is gently subsiding into mature, carpet-slippered ease. Its current productions, whatever their merits, show a relaxation of standards, a suspension of effort, an aesthetic fatigue. *Prologue to Glory,* at the Maxine Elliot, is a type of "little," sentimental play that the WPA has never previously stooped to offer—at least not on Broadway, though I understand that a number of hokum, patriotic works on Jefferson and other American statesmen were sent to tour the provinces in the early days of the Project. *Haiti,* at the Lafayette, which is stunningly successful on its own terms, is yet by no means as original or as enterprising as the Negro *Macbeth,* and *"one-third of a nation,"* at the Adelphi, is a retrogression from *Power.*

*Prologue to Glory,* Mr. E. P. Conkle's play about the young Lincoln, is the least prepossessing of the new WPA offerings. It is a trivial pastiche of Lincoln myths, moral platitudes, and dialect humor, messily stuck together with the gum arabic of a conventional love story. Like all the other plays and films which set out to show the "human side" of our national heroes, it has humanized its subject out of all heroism. The best one can say for it is that it is thoroughly democratic, since it illustrates with a vengeance the infinite possibilities for self-advancement that are supposed to lie open to every man under our system of government. If this dull-witted, tractable, comical yokel, said by the playwright to be Abraham Lincoln, could rise to be President of the United States, why so, one thinks, could you and I and the village idiot. There is no hint in Mr. Conkle's play of the almost monomaniac ambition, the driving power, the passion, the violence, the harsh intelligence of the real Lincoln. Here there is only a droll, awkward, lovesick boy, strong and stupid as his father's ox. The audience is invited to love this boy, not for his genius but for his absurdity; and, audiences being only too susceptible to such indirect flattery, a spirit of teary patronage toward the Great Emancipator is nightly wafted across the footlights.

Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, declared that Lincoln "never at any time abandoned the idea of becoming a lawyer. That was always a spirit which beckoned him on in the darkest hour of his adversity." Mr. Conkle prefers to believe that it was the spirit of Ann Rutledge that did the trick. The climax of the play shows Lincoln demoralized by her premature death, determined to abandon the law and to return to his father's farm. (He had previously thought of the law, it seems, chiefly as a means of buying Ann the "purties" her beauty and charm demanded.) Fortunately for the Union an older and wiser friend is on



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hand to remind the boy that Ann would have wished him to pursue his studies. Once his duty to the deceased is brought home to him, Abraham embarks, in his own lackadaisical fashion, for Springfield and the White House.

This plot, while not so good as the real one, might have served Mr. Conkle at least as well as it has served others had he been able to see in the love affair anything but a worn, genteel daguerreotype of the village queen and the bashful beau. This flabby courtship is too deficient in sinews to hold the play's sketchy scenes together, so that the work lacks in the end even the coherence of its own convictions.

Mr. William Du Bois' play, *Haiti,* though it is not in its details historically more accurate than Mr. Conkle's, has spirit, color, and, above all, focus. The difference between the two plays is well illustrated by their different treatments of the stage set. In both cases, a good deal of action takes place offstage. This offstage action is vitally important to Mr. Du Bois' play, where a revolution is going on throughout the story, and foolishly irrelevant to Mr. Conkle's play, where a stranger passing down an offstage road is of sufficient interest to distract the characters and the playwright from the boredom into which events on the stage have plunged them. But, waiving the question of relevancy, and turning to the conception and construction of the sets themselves, one sees that the set of *Haiti* has been beautifully planned to relate the stage to the imaginary world beyond it, while the set of *Prologue to Glory* has established no connection at all. The scene of *Haiti* is a room in a country house which is used as a headquarters first by the Negro officials of the island, then by the French. Directly across from the house are the mountains in which the insurgent Negro army is hiding, and to the audience's left is the harbor. A relation between the house, the mountains, and the harbor, has been created, very simply, by the use of a balcony, upstage center, which becomes the focal point of the play, the point at which the inside and outside worlds converge and communicate. There is no such point in *Prologue to Glory.* Papier maché trees fade into a backdrop of fields and hills: the stage is wide open; the characters, rubber-necking toward the wings, dangle aimlessly in space.

As the diffuseness of Mr. Conkle's play manifests itself even in the stage set, so the tightness of Mr. Du Bois' triangular setting reinforces the wedge-like concentration of his script. The play is merely a glorified melodrama, but it has Liberty for its theme, and it is acted with superb and consistent style. It tells of Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean Christophe, who wrested Haiti from Napoleon; but this is only half its story. The drunken, brutal French commandant of the island garrison has for his wife a lovely Frenchwoman, who is, unknown to herself, the daughter of the Negro butler who serves her. The butler, also, is not what he seems, but is actually one of Christophe's officers, set to spy on his employers. Signals flash out at night to the rebel army in the mountains; the mistress abets her father-servant; a correct and sympathetic young French officer woos the mulatto lady; Jean Christophe pops out of a secret panel; and the island is won from the French. This is not

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a very likely tale, but it is a rousing one, and Mr. Du Bois demonstrates his superiority to Mr. Conkle by his discretion in handling it.

In the first place it is written and played with an unabashed bravura which forces temporary conviction upon the audience. In the second place, Mr. Du Bois, unlike Mr. Conkle, seems to be conscious of both the uses and the dangers of falsification in an historical drama. Mr. Conkle's falsifications, except for a few minor perversions and transpositions of fact, begin and end with the character of Lincoln. Mr. Du Bois' falsifications embrace all his run-of-the-mill characters, but never touch his heroes, Toussaint and Christophe. Toussaint and Christophe move in and out of the intrigue plot, but they are not governed by its laws. Mr. Du Bois, in fact, treats his intrigue plot in the same way that he treats his secret panel, in the same way that other writers have treated the aside or the trap-door. It is a simple, mechanical device, a short cut. Just as the secret panel makes it easier for Christophe to enter the house, so the sensational imbroglio in the commandant's household makes it easier for Christophe to make his revolution and for the audience to watch it. Christophe is the beneficiary of the melodrama, not its creature. It is true that Christophe belongs to the melodrama to the extent that his character can, under the circumstances given, never be deeply searched or roundly sculptured. Yet his prime attributes *can* be clearly seen—the primitive courage and sweetness linked to libertarian idealism, the Emperor Jones uniform symbolically topped by the Phrygian cap. In the floridity and fervor of this vision lie the play's strength and its weakness.

The remote, operatic past of Mr. Du Bois' setting allows him to employ a shamelessly antiquated dramatic technique. *"One-third of a nation"* faces an exigent contemporary problem—housing—and one would expect this fifth production of the Living Newspaper to use all the innovations of the modern theater. A great many new devices do in fact appear, and, had this production not been preceded by *Power,* one might think it the last word in experimental stagecraft. As compared to *Power,* however, *"one-third of a nation"* shows the Living Newspaper on the road back to Belasco realism.

This technical reversion is partly conditioned by the current play's subject-matter. A play about housing is necessarily more concerned with people, with the single human atom, than a play about power, which interests itself in atoms of another sort. There will, consequently, be less stylization and more realism in the housing play. The set of *"one-third of a nation,"* is a four-story, old-law tenement house, with the front wall partly torn away to afford both an inside and an outside view of tenement accommodations. It is a masterpiece of grisly realism, and, as such, completely defensible, for what stylization of a tenement could demonstrate the horrors of modern housing as well as a tenement itself? Likewise, it is natural and right that this Living Newspaper should tell the stories of some of the people who lived in the tenement, should make plain how these cramped, dark, unhygienic, inflammable quarters affected the lives of those who occupied them. The two tenement fires,

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which begin and end the play, the cholera epidemic, the premature enlightenment of the little boy who watches a prostitute in her room across the areaway—all these episodes, all realistically presented, are the high spots of the play.

Yet these scenes, however, affecting, seem like excerpts from a conventional play. They are, in fact, like excerpts from *Dead End,* which, with more sensationalism and less social and economic awareness, was saying the same thing. What is there in *"one-third of a nation,"* then, to justify its not being written and staged in the traditional manner? Why that movie screen, that amplified Voice of the Living Newspaper, that ubiquitous, intrusive figure of the Consumer, the Little Man Who Wants to Be Housed? The answer is plain. Each Living Newspaper is intended to be a large, socio-economic document which has the power of summary and generalization to go behind case histories to origins, and beyond case histories to cures. The originality of *Power* came from its fusion of the abstract and the particular. A high school lesson in economics, which dramatized the monopoly in terms of colored blocks of wood, was shortly succeeded by a "human spectacle," in which a crowd of individualized Tennesseans danced to the coming of the TVA. In *"one-third of a nation"* there is still an attempt at historical survey and economic analysis, but the human "realistic," element has eaten into the textbook side of the play with confusing and disastrous results.

Everything that in *Power* was abstract has here become personalized. An anthropomorphizing mania has pervaded the script. In the study of the development of land values, instead of the blocks of wood which so well demonstrated their efficiency in the earlier play, the lesson is acted out by people with well marked characteristics, in full period dress. The Consumer appears again, but now he is outfitted with a great many more homely crotchets of behavior, and, as if he were not human enough by himself, he has been endowed with a wife. Even the tenement house has a personality and a voice. Where the play should be at its most business-like, most informative, it is actually at its most whimsical. The characters assigned to forces and tendencies blur, by their concrete and untimely humanity, the perception of the forces themselves. Representationalism and pedestrian fantasy, replacing the clean, geometric didacticism of *Power,* have muddied and elongated the play's exposition. The result is that the peripheral story-telling sections of the play, to which verisimilitude of characterization is appropriate, quite overshadow the central expository sections, to which it is not. We remember the example and forget the theorem.

It is possible that the shyness with which *"one-third of a nation"* expresses its theorem is deliberate. It is possible that the walking portraits, the speaking likenesses, that crowd the stage are there to create a diversion. For the play's theorem is certainly faulty. The housing problem is far knottier than the power problem. It is, in fact, impossible of solution under capitalism, even the liberal capitalism of the New Deal. The government can expropriate the power plants without upsetting the system; and, as was pointed out in *Power,* many municipalities

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have already done so. It cannot, however, take over housing, for to do that would be to expropriate the land. *"One-third of a nation,"* as a WPA play, is therefore in no position to offer the one effectual remedy for the evil it pictures. It can demonstrate, with many playful and distracting flourishes, that the origin of the housing problem lay in the private ownership and exploitation of the land; it dare not suggest that the cure lies in public ownership and public planning. It must plead, instead, for palliative legislation. The spectator, having been intermittently harrowed by scenes of slum life, scenes which cry for revolutionary action, is blandly invited to write to his congressman. The triumphal march of state-owned power into the Tennessee Valley, which was the grand climactic moment of the last Living Newspaper, has its tragicomic parallel in *"one-third of a nation"*—the passage of the miserably inadequate Wagner-Stekel Housing Act.

*"One-third of a nation,"* outwardly the most showy of Living Newspaper productions, is inwardly the least ambitious. The Living Newspaper, being the adjunct of an Administration which has exhausted its political resources, is itself becoming superannuated. It has already chronicled the victories of the New Deal; it can hardly go on to immortalize the omissions and failures.

The Living Newspaper, because of its subject-matter, would, of all the branches of the Federal Theater, be naturally the most sensitive to the Administration's fatigue. But the relative tameness of all the new WPA plays suggests that the Federal Theater as a whole is running dry. This is a disappointment, but not exactly a surprise.

In the first place, one might have expected that the impulse that set the Project going would, when it met the combined resistance of congressional interference, bureaucratic red tape, and reduced appropriations, lose a certain amount of its force. Something that is felt as a new Idea is inevitably a little dimmed by being managed as a Business. More significant, however, is the fact that the Federal Theater, like all the New Deal ventures, is a half-measure, a makeshift. It is a work relief project which aspires to be a National Theater, and its ambition, unfortunately, is incompatible with its economic base. Its initial success was due partly to the intelligence and energy of its director, Mrs. Flanagan, and partly to the fact that it was launched at a time when the commercial theater was still in the grip of the depression. Producers were unusually cautious, and a great deal of adventurous young talent was unemployed. The Federal Theater offered that talent the security of a minimum wage and endless opportunities for experimentation. With the revival of the commercial theater, the best of the WPA's writers, composers, actors, and directors were quickly absorbed into private industry. The Federal Theater, in short, had acted merely as an incubator, and now it must await a new theatrical depression and a new crop of talent before it can recover its original élan. The moral is that a government which dares not pay the prevailing wage, which dares not, in other words, compete economically with private industry, cannot in the long run compete with it artistically.

MARY MCCARTHY

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# BOOKS

## EDMUND WILSON'S CRITICISM

THE TRIPLE THINKERS: Ten Essays on Literature. *By Edmund Wilson. Harcourt, Brace.* $2.75.

The apotheosis of poetry in our time seems to have been part of the great post-war revolt against pre-war cosmopolitanism. The effort was made, notably by T. S. Eliot and his followers, to impress a homogeneous culture on the contemporary welter; and the past had accordingly to be simplified so that the newly-ordered present might seem to rest on a congenial and orderly tradition. Now the culture that sprang, as though by decree, from the writings of Eliot was predominantly a poetic one; the tradition became therewith a poetic tradition; and literary criticism, largely a coefficient of the creative movement, chiefly an exercise in taste and sensibility—though colored, it is true, by a quest for the higher moralities—became a medium for the linear and verbal appreciation of poetry. Prose—unless it were the prose of theologians—was systematically snubbed, along with the whole tradition of science and historical research which is bound up with prose. Eliot handles fiction with a gingerly condescension. Paul Valéry has admitted that to him "the art of the novel is an almost inconceivable art." And Allen Tate, who always ventures a step farther than anyone else, has professed to find poetry a refuge from the "literature of the will"; by which he means, one gathers, the literature of ideas, the modern novel.

*The Triple Thinkers* embodies a modest though effective criticism of the post-war school, and one of its essays, "Is Verse a Dying Technique?," is directed at the cult of poetry in particular. This essay is by way of being a shocker. When it first came out, in embryo, in *The New Republic,* there was much alarm. And since its publication in final form in *The Triple Thinkers,* the alarm has increased. Yet the idea is not new with Mr. Wilson. It first emerged, if I remember, in *Axel's Castle.* And how many have observed that the essay is aimed as much at modern criticism as at modern verse? We have to distinguish among the things the essay tries to do, and decide its merits accordingly. And insofar as Mr. Wilson means to assail the cherished distinction between verse and prose, to assert the historical relativity of the two forms, to show that ideology transcends literary techniques, and to lay bare the process by which, under the sway of poet-critics from Coleridge to Eliot, verse has gradually become the norm of literature, and the lyric the norm of verse, his effort is masterly and far-reaching. But the essay goes farther: it



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wants us to do more than reëxamine our criteria. It sets the modern novel *above* the modern poem, and pointing to the technical decline of recent verse, predicts its imminent collapse. Now up to a certain point it is hard not to agree. Certainly the modern novel has gathered to itself the broadest experience of the age, and thus shown itself to be the heir of the poetic epic and the poetic drama. But, though true of the past and the near-past, is this true today? And should not the state of the novel in 1938 warn us against invidious prophecies as to its future as compared with the future of verse?

Mr. Wilson's attack on the dogmas of the poetic tradition involves a long train of consequences for criticism, and many of them are of course observable in his own work. *In Axel's Castle* the critical touchstones were literary methods: Symbolism and Naturalism; but in *The Triple Thinkers,* which follows *The American Jitters* and *Travels in Two Democracies*—both books ventures in purely social criticism—the criteria are supplied by significant ideas. And this shift brings about a re-grouping of the writers of the past, and leads to the discovery of a whole range of buried correspondences among them. So, coming to Pushkin, we find that his kinship with Byron is minimized, while his kinship with the Russian novelists and French realists is underscored. And Flaubert, instead of being shown in his relation to the Symbolists—with whom, on the basis of his artistic asceticism, he is usually associated—is shown in his relation to Karl Marx, to the social novelist George Sand, to the historians Michelet, Renan and Taine, and to the historical critic Sainte-Beuve. Henry James, conventionally the architect of aristocratic romances, finds a place, marginal, to be sure, in the democratic American tradition and emerges, along with Samuel Butler, as one of the satirists of the money power. With Bernard Shaw, finally, the process is reversed: and Shaw, who is always held up as a specimen of the social philosopher in the arts, is shown to have drawn heavily on the heritage of the romantic hero, and, like the Symbolists, to have adapted musical forms to his writing. Thus, at the touch of the historical method, the technical distinctions in literature dwindle in importance; ideology appears as the common denominator, and the traditions of the past re-form along new lines.

*The Triple Thinkers* is well-stored with novelties and paradoxes, most of which, given the novel method and point of view, seem thoroughly justified. But, as a possible exception, consider Henry James. It is true that, between his critics and his partisans, between those who exalt him on grounds of technique and those who disparage him on grounds of patriotism, the "old Balzac in James" has been lost sight of; and Mr. Wilson's account of him, which gives due weight to the social factor, is the best study and estimate of James in existence. But it doesn't necessarily follow that the novels of his grimmest, most Balzacian "middle period" are to be preferred, as Mr. Wilson would have it, to the works of his "poetic," next-to-last period. On the contrary, don't *The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* incorporate, together with the Balzac in James, the Pope in him—the poet, that is, with

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a sensuous symbolic vision of the object of satire—and don't they, therefore, despite their extravagances, their "exploitation of the mysteries of technique" (which Mr. Wilson is right in deploring), best represent the complete James? In the case of John Jay Chapman, Mr. Wilson has done a remarkable job of literary anthropology, but here again one quarrels with some of his conclusions. He has unearthed a new and complex specimen of the frustrated American genius to stand beside Henry Adams. Chapman, it seems, had something of Rimbaud's talent for suffering and for symbolic action; but he was a Promethean who never quite delivered the fire. And quoting from his highly varied and uniformly forgotten writings, Mr. Wilson makes out a good case for him as a letter-writer, and above all as a character. But one cannot so easily accept Chapman as a literary critic. For the same bristling individualism and anti-theoretical bent that crippled his career in politics, seem to have been at work in his criticism, which, though sensitive and informed in the item, rests in bulk on the crude and paralyzing assumption that art is simply a form of magic.

For the rest, the ten essays in *The Triple Thinkers* are the first mature body of criticism to come out of the social movement in America. I have stressed Mr. Wilson's relation to the Eliot movement because, after some ten years of left-wing sniping, it is still strong—not vital, perhaps, but tenacious, awaiting the *coup de grace;* and Mr. Wilson, with his enormous sympathy for writers and writing, his liveliness, his charm, his uncanny talent for communicating, and his ability to uncover, not only the social factor but the element of ambiguity, the play of contradictions, in the esthetic process, is the first critic of the left to have achieved on any scale a new approach. How has he managed it? Perhaps through taking a broad and flexible view of his job in a period when critics, preoccupied with defining their terms and functions, are mostly bogged down in programmatic controversies. Such is the positive value of an intelligent empiricism in an age of sterile formulas.

His debt to Marxism, at any rate, is slighter than it might appear; it consists mainly in the general historical emphasis he gives his work. And his essay, "Marxism and Literature," which complements the article on poetry and shows his work to be directed as much against the cruder forms of ideological criticism as against the metaphysical school, proves a somewhat enervated product of the post-Stalinist scepticism—a little abstract and apologetic, exhibiting in the formulation of principles a tentativeness which may be native to the critic but which the period has certainly encouraged. Essentially a political philosophy, a form of "social engineering," Marxism, according to Mr. Wilson, can only throw light on "the origins and social significance of works of art"; by itself it can teach us "nothing whatever about the goodness or badness of a work of art." So, unless he is content to remain a sociologist in the arts, the Marxist critic must, when it is a question of standards and sensibility, become something *other* than a Marxist. One wonders whether such a dual life is really possible. For what is criticism if it is not a method of literary analysis organized around a set of coherent values? And where is the

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revolutionary critic to get his standards if not from the program on which, as a revolutionary individual, he operates?

To return to the tradition of Eliot—that was founded on a unity of rejection; but it *was* a unity; and for a decade it wonderfully transformed literature. Mr. Wilson's criticism, though it offers no organic alternative, curbs the sins of specialization of that movement and combines its esthetic maturity with the insights of social history.

F. W. DUPEE

## THE DIALECTIC ACCORDING TO LEVY

A PHILOSOPHY FOR A MODERN MAN. *By H. Levy. Alfred A. Knopf.* $2.50.

There is no doubt in the reviewer's mind that this is the most intelligent exposition of dialectical materialism that he has read. Mr. Levy gives us what on first reading seems to be a fully adequate interpretation of the higher mysteries of the dialectical process. Rather than the product of an incantation and a mood, the Hegelian triadic hop-scotch becomes something tangible, and something which can occasionally be verified empirically in the field of physics as well as in the social field.

Viewed superficially, the book has one welcome characteristic—it does not mention as examples of "contradictions" in nature the plus and minus sign, action and reaction in mechanics, male and female, and positive and negative charges of electricity. Levy is a scientist, and does not have to parade his ignorance by hobbling on these splintered old crutches. As examples of the change of quantity into quality the tattered old instance of water changing to steam is not mentioned. And the illustrations used are more fresh and hence more convincing than those which veteran readers are accustomed to.

But as if to offset this feature, and still talking of its surface qualities, the book suffers from a serious defect. The first few chapters are almost sprightly, the style here being a valid earnest of fresh thought. But as one reads on the style becomes gradually more soggy, and each page becomes more painful to read, in a very literal sense. The sentences become more wordy. Clichés and stereotypes stud the paragraph like gravel incrusted on an asphalt road. And two or three readings of a page are often necessary to grasp meanings which efficiently expressed could be grasped at sight, since there is nothing particularly difficult or unfamiliar about them.

Levy's book has, as we already know, received the *nihil obstat* from the *censors librorum* in this country. But that does not free it from theoretical difficulties of a very deep and serious nature. And yet the freshest aspect of his thought, his exposition of scientific method, gives him adequate basis to arrive without difficulty at conclusions intimately in harmony with the best and most radical developments in contemporary philosophy.

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Levy's exposition of dialectical materialism is grounded on a conception of "isolates" within which the scientist's investigations are carried out. An "isolate" is "a bit of a wider situation," methodologically separated in order to study, for certain specific purposes, the processes which go on within its restricted field. The difference between the exact sciences and common sense thinking, however, is one of degree of precision; science is but an extension of the thought used daily by unsophisticated men in the pursuit of ordinary practical ends. Both laymen and scientists address themselves to the discovery of processes within the field under analysis. I repeat this, already stated above, for the sake of emphasis, since it is the failure to realize its full implication that gives rise to the crucial difficulty of materialistic philosophy.

That it is the processes of nature that the scientist is in search of, Levy himself is quite well aware of. Thus on page 65 of his earlier book on scientific method, *The Universe of Science,* he tells us, "From the standpoint here adopted we see that the great adventure of science lies in the query, 'Are there any processes in Nature that can not be adequately explored by seeking for isolated systems neutral to their environment?' " And again, eight pages farther on in the same book, "We have viewed science as an examination of . . . what is happening in detail in the universe." Of course the purpose of the search for what is happening in Nature is accurate prediction and, through it, efficient control. That is what modern men demand of science in the social field no less than in the field of the brute physical environment. And that is what Levy is interested in finding out. The very chapter headings of the book under review tell the story: "How a Quality Is Modified," "How a Quality Is Transformed," "What Causes Change," What Causes Change in Society: Being a Study of Social Development." Thus the main emphasis in the central chapters of the present book is on process.

But if it is process that science is in search of, and if science is but a refined extension of common sense, what need is there for a Marxist to load himself up with the inert baggage of a metaphysic, as Levy does? What need to assert that "science" demands a "materialistic philosophy?" It would seem, rather, if we can find enough courage to strip ourselves of all this stuff, that materialism is just as childish a metaphysical incantation about the alleged "nature of things" as idealism is.

This of course does not in any way whatever impinge on the validity of the theory of economic determinism. For economic determinism—historical materialism, if the term be preferred—is the belief that the processes of history can best be understood, for the purposes of prediction and efficient control, by referring them to economic forces as "basic" factors. And this doctrine, susceptible of verification, and already adequately verified, is a methodological device, not a metaphysic about "the nature of things." Nor can these remarks be taken in any way as giving comfort to the muddle-headed needs of idealists or panpsychists or any other such emotionally immature searchers after im-

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mutable peace. For if "philosophic materialism" is meaningless, it is at least a doctrine with which a mature person can have some sympathy, since it eschews an anthropocentric approach to nature, and is therefore in harmony with the whole movement of modern thought since Copernicus. But this is more than idealism, which of course is as retrograde in its philosophic orientation as it is reactionary in its political implications, can claim for itself.

It may be argued that all that is meant by "materialism" is the belief that there is only one Nature, and that the only way to understand it is to study its processes by means of the empirical methods of science; in short, Naturalism. If it is called materialism, it may be urged, it is to emphasize the fact that the scientist can have no commerce with agencies or forces or powers which cannot be observed empirically; and further to emphasize the fact that "consciousness" or "mind" is to be explained by means of the same method, essentially, as has been so successful in explaining other natural phenomena. Unfortunately for the argument, however, something more is meant by materialism than this, since materialism involves also a metaphysic of substance and qualities, proper to a belief that the quest of science is for "the nature of things," rather than for the structural processes of nature. And the objections to a search for "the nature of things" are so many that we must be content to list here only two or three. Nothing is gained by asserting that all of nature is "matter," for what do we know when we know that? And what is meant by the remark, made by Levy, that "mind" is a "quality" of matter? What do we know of its genesis, its processes, and of its control, when we know that?

Committed to a metaphysic of substance and quality, the philosophic materialist keeps on fighting the ghosts of 19th century idealism with weapons which the history of philosophy down to our very day has shown are inadequate to blast it. For against materialism the arguments of a Ward, or in our day, even of a Dawes Hicks, are still valid. With a materialistic metaphysic, "mind" remains *an entity*, however much the materialist may assert that he does not mean an entity by it, and the alleged mind-body problem hangs over him like a poisonous cloud which ends up by suffocating him. The problem of the existence of the material world is only downed by ignoring it. And the obsession with these pseudo-problems, all arising out of materialism, prevents us from turning to an investigation of such aspects of social behaviour as communication, by means of which the mysteries of the so-called "mind" have in our day already begun to be resolved.

It is unnecessary therefore for the economic determinist to burden himself with the obsolete baggage of metaphysical materialism. All the more since this baggage is of no use whatever in enabling him to achieve an adequate control within the physical or the social field.

This is not the only serious difficulty which the careful reader of Levy's book will come across. There is at least one other, involving perhaps more immediate practical consequences for those to whom this

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book is addressed. I mean Levy's belief in the inevitability of the advent of the classless society.* No doubt at this moment, when barbarism is drunk with triumph on all fronts, the belief in the inevitable success of socialism has a supreme consolatory value. But this is hardly an argument for its truth. In the long run, the consolation a false belief brings us is not worth the price we pay for it. In any case, since we are far from beaten, what we need today is not consolation but a practical program which will be efficient in stopping the victorious rampage of the barbarians. Because Levy does not offer such a program this book, it would seem, is quite appropriately entitled. For its content is little else than *a philosophy*—with emphasis on both words—for *a* modern man; bearing in mind that philosophy, historically, has never been much more than an intellectual substitute for consolatory religion.

ELISEO VIVAS

## POMPES FUNEBRES DE TROISIEME CLASSE

FOUR FRENCH NOVELISTS. *By Georges Lemaître. Oxford University Press.* $3.50.

The official mode of French rhetoric, suitable for every occasion, is the eulogy. The final canon of academic criticism, especially when professed *in partibus infidelium,* is the ability to convert every living figure it touches into something illustrious, immortal, worthy to be immured in the Panthéon and commemorated by the name of a street, but unreservedly dead. Anyone who has ever written anything is guaranteed under the cultural dispensation of the Third Republic his inalienable right to a *vie,* an *oeuvre,* and a *pensée.* The *vie* and the *oeuvre* tend, in critical practice, to get glowingly muddled, so that the author is credited with the deeds of his characters and the books are viewed as chapters in his autobiography. But the *pensée,* when everything else has been abstracted from it, remains, electric, inviolate, and—as we are so often told—French.

The author of this book proceeds from Marcel Proust to André Gide, from André Gide to Jean Giraudoux, and from Jean Giraudoux to Paul Morand, devoting about a hundred pages to each, and remaining quite cheerful up to the end. On his stolid and nondescript level of exposition, there is room for neither esthetic distinctions nor social implications. Then, once we have wearily acknowledged that they are all modern and cosmopolite and nervous and eclectic, what sort of pattern do his four novelists make? M. Lemaître claims that they "offer perhaps the

* The arguments against historical inevitability, which I have no space to present here, are brilliantly outlined in an article by Mr. William Gruen in vol. xxxiii, no. 23, of the *Journal of Philosophy.* The interested reader is referred to this article.

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most provocative and enlightening *exposé* of certain essential trends in contemporary French civilization and literature." Proust and Gide unquestionably do, but can there be anyone left—outside of the Alliance Française—who still derives stimulus and illumination from Giraudoux and Morand?

Surely their modernity is dated, dated by the post-war Paris of the early twenties and not by the pre-war France of the late thirties. Surely M. Lemaître is over-optimistic, to stake half of his book on the so-called Quai d'Orsay school at this low moment in the prestige of that institution. Giraudoux and Morand, it is true, are typical Frenchmen in a sense that excludes Proust and Gide—conventional careers and stock successes. Reckless and sympathetic in details, cold-blooded and conformist in essentials. Yet Morand's most sensational discoveries were already commonplace with us, and as for Giraudoux, well, we went to another *lycée* and learned a different set of jokes. Jewish and protestant backgrounds, abnormal lives, morbid sensibilities made outsiders of Proust and Gide, gave warmth to their reactions and depth to their analyses. Perhaps that is why their work is more pertinent than ever today, and more interesting to us.

In fact, if we were looking for experiment and observation, if we were anxious to enrich our knowledge of structure and characterization, we should do better to continue from Proust with a different sequence of novelists—with the panned shots of Jules Romains or the heroic episodes of Malraux, with witnesses like Roger Martin du Gard and Drieu la Rochelle or portents like Céline and Jean Guéhenno. Gide is not primarily a novelist any more than Rousseau or Lawrence; he is a moral force, a literary influence, a voice in the wilderness. By his own confession, he has produced but one novel, and *Les faux-monnayeurs* gains its fragmentary fullness by juxtaposing sharp satirical sketches against the *cahiers intimes* of the author—the method exploited with such equivocal results in *Point Counter Point* and *U. S. A.* The charades of Giraudoux and the rotogravure sections of Morand scarcely bring us nearer to any definition of the novel, unless we want the novelist to improvise upon well-worn themes for the thirty-eighth time and blur their banalities with exotic atmosphere, or to set up hypotheses as plots and people them with chauvinistic robots.

Yet the notion of writing a novel to illustrate a point is fairly widespread, so widespread that critics demur only when a novel is written to illustrate a political point. The French expect a novelist to have a position as we expect him to have a pose. They explicitly encourage him to be a sophist; they ask him for clear and distinct ideas which are also trivial and misleading ones; they grant him unlimited intellectual licence. His views, however heterodox, are calmly categorized by methods like those of M. Lemaître, and duly cancelled out by the counterweight of somebody else's entertaining heresies. If a novelist has some serious things to say about society, they are all true in a Pickwickian *façon de parler*. And if the strictures of Proust and Gide add

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up to a devastating condemnation of their world, *eh bien!* here are MM. Giraudoux and Morand who accept their particular world debonairely.

M. Lemaître's most irresponsible shrug occurs at the stage where he should be discussing Gide's communism. The Russian adventures give him a pretext to regard this as merely another neurosis like Gide's homosexuality, a further mutation in a career of striving and straying. But if fad were the motive, Gide would have found it easier to accept Claudel's bidding to Catholicism several years before, or at least to acquiesce more comfortably into the Soviet regime. If uncertainty were the outcome, the whole history of his ethical investigations, before and after his conversion to Marxism, would lack its inevitable complement. Most converts already have a way of life and are seeking a set of convictions; Gide started with intense, if undogmatic, convictions, and is still hoping to find a way of life. One did not need to be a Trotskyist to foresee that Gide would make a more candid than prudent communist. One does not need to be a Stalinist to admit that Gide would have been wiser to remain on Pisgah.

In spite of a daring speculation as to the effect of the Commune on the pre-natal conditioning of Proust, M. Lemaître hardly tries to give his book historical orientation. When his publishers mention "new documents" they apparently refer to the fact that, along with every other student of the subject, he has utilized Albert Feuillerat's studies in Proust's method of composition. In reducing to his own elementary level these highly technical researches, which lay bare the successive strata of *A la recherche du temps perdu,* M. Lemaître circulates the impression that Proust was at cross-purposes with himself. Thus the crucial quality of disillusion becomes incidental to the development of the novelist, rather than organic in the conception of the novel. M. Feuillerat, by a brilliant projection of Proust's own attitude, shows him continually enlarging his design, shifting his emphasis, and sharpening his delineation. M. Lemaître, who has not grasped the essence of this relativism, may misguide readers into believing that Proust's work was an ambitious failure. If that be true, it is also true of the *Aeneid* and the *Canterbury Tales.*

A Procrustean method involves both lopping off and stretching out —lopping in the case of Proust and Gide, stretching in the case of Giraudoux and Morand. Here is a fair example of stretching: "So the material of Giraudoux's art will be found to lie precisely where his sensibility meets the external world." If this means anything at all, it means something that would be equally valid for any writer; but nearly everything one could say about Giraudoux would be that. Again, it is not surprising to find M. Lemaître's account of Gide an obvious condensation of Léon Pierre-Quint's book, but it is a shock to discover the somewhat vague and far-fetched French word *trust* translated by the tasteless English expression "brain trust." It is a disturbing consolation to realize that all this would sound better in French. In English, M.

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Lemaître is like the man from Cook's who is ready, with the same deft catholicity and standardized enthusiasm, to escort us through the Sainte-Chapelle or the Maison de Toutes Nations.

HARRY LEVIN

## LYNCH PATTERNS

UNCLE TOM'S CHILDREN. *By Richard Wright. Harpers.* $2.50.

Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* will serve as an excellent refutation for those who are now writing such fancy nonsense about fables and allegories. These four novelettes are written in a direct and realistic manner, and their impact is most powerful. I submit that they are worth more as literature than whole anthologies full of tortured allegories.

*Uncle Tom's Children* was submitted to a contest conducted by *Story* magazine, which offered $500 for a work written by an employee of the WPA Federal Writers' Project. This book was selected as the prize winner from among five hundred manuscripts. I think there is no question that it was an excellent choice.

Each of Mr. Wright's four novelettes is different, yet all have a common background. In consequence, they fit together to make a genuinely integrated book. What Richard Wright does here is to recount the bitter experience of the Negro in a white man's world, and the bitter meaning of his experience. His stories are full of the violence, the brutal injustice, the terror, the utter misery that arise from economic exploitation and the rule of lynch law. In each of the stories, the tragedy, the brutality, and the misery seem to result from some accidental occurrence, some unfortunate coincidence. For example: in "Big Boy Leaves Home" a carefree group of boys are swimming in a forbidden pond. Their actions are harmless. But just when they come out of the water, a white woman appears. They are all naked, and the white woman stands in the path they must take to reach their clothes. Two of the boys are shot dead on the spot. One is burned by a mob. Big Boy shoots the white woman's escort in self defense, hides out from the mob, and manages to escape to the north next morning. There is real pertinency in Wright's use of accident and coincidence. He is not contriving. By using such devices as hinges for his narrative, he is able to present vividly and concretely a sense of the social effects of the patterns of lynch law. And the moment the reader realizes what is being done, the stories acquire intensified meanings for him. A tension runs through them that contributes greatly to their impact. The atmosphere is constantly explosive, and anything that happens can result in the calling of a mob. I know of no more effective presentation of the pernicious effects of the lynch pattern than these stories of Richard Wright's. We see the consequences concretely

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in terms of human destinies. The white men are always inclined to shoot first and then ask questions as to why they shot. Nerves pop. Trigger fingers are given deadly exercise. Ropes are brought out. With great courage and passionate protest Richard Wright has told the story of his own people. He minces no words. And there is no questioning the authenticity of his work.

Especially remarkable is the handling of dialogue. Richard Wright uses simple speech as a means of carrying on his narrative, as a medium for poetic and lyrical effects, and as an instrument of characterization. Through the dialect of his people he is able to generalize their feelings about life, their fate, the social situation in which they they live and suffer and are oppressed. Here is a demonstration—which many writers might study—of the possibilities of the vernacular.

However, it should be remarked that Wright is addicted to certain mannerisms which are unnecessary and which detract from the development of his stories. He is inclined to spread capital letters all over his pages in order to gain emphasis, when such sensationalism is absolutely needless. He shows a tendency to overwrite when he speaks auctorially and when he wants to describe complicated emotions and poetic backgrounds. Then he has bare feet whisper too much in the dark, and there is too much ebb and surge in the blood of his characters. And at times he gets lost in complicated or swift moving narrative. In part, at least, these are mannerisms which can easily be dropped with a little more work and some self-conscious reflection on writing as a technique. Such criticisms notwithstanding, *Uncle Tom's Children* remains as a true and powerful work by a new American writer. It is a book of bitter truths and bitter tragedies written by an able and sensitive talent. It is not merely a book of promise. It is a genuine literary achievement.

JAMES T. FARRELL

## TWO VIEWS OF CUMMINGS

COLLECTED POEMS. *By E. E. Cummings. Harcourt, Brace.* $2.50.

I

It would be nice to have all of Cummings' published verse collected in one volume, arranged chronologically and printed in its original form and order. This would have the statistical virtues of a complete and orderly docket whereby to review the pros and cons of his claims on poetry. It would be even nicer—not to say more valuable to have a selection of the very best of his work arranged in some kind of descending scale of categories (Sonnets, Satires, Sexires, and Whimsies alliterates to mind.) Aside from genuine literary value such a volume would have the virtues of economy:—clarity, efficiency, and paucity—and the greatest of these, perhaps, would be paucity. It would probably be about

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one fourth the size of the present fat collection. But the book at hand is neither of these: it is not a complete collection, nor is it by any conceivably acceptable standards a selection. To my mind its best description is to call it mostfully an unbook.

In the first place it includes most, but not all and sometimes not even the best, of the poetry from *Tulips and Chimneys,* &, *XLI Poems, Is 5, Viva,* and *No Thanks,* as well as a score of new poems. Two of the best poems in his early traditional manner, "Epithalamium" and "Puella Mea" are omitted, and many of his best sonnets; the list is too long to be specific. In the second place, it is almost impossible to find a given poem without leafing through pages of trivial eccentricities and getting the typographical jitters. The poems are simply numbered 1-315. There is no index of first lines, nor is there any convenient division by subject matter as was often used in the original editions. True, the table of contents lists the poems chronologically by volumes; thus *Tulips and Chimneys* is represented by poems 1-47. But if you want to find the poem on Picasso, for instance, which originally appeared as one of the "Portraits" in *Tulips and Chimneys,* you will now discover it among *XLI Poems* as number 103. Another of the "Portraits" comes to light as poem 51. Likewise, two of the "La Guerre" poems, originally in *Tulips and Chimneys,* are now numbered 69 and 101 under *&* and *XLI Poems* respectively. Apparently *Unsinn* is the appropriate active principal in the making of this unbook.

As regards the poetry, the most general statement to be made is that it shows no technical improvement or intellectual development over a period of fifteen years. The *enfant terrible* of 1923 has become the professional *vieux gaillard* of today—a poet distinctly *manqué.* The poetry gives one an apparently inexhaustible repetition, not of ideas or even emotions, but of moods, whimsies, attitudes, prejudices—in short all the effluvia of personality; and the personality is one that has been a familiar museum-piece in the whatnots of literary parlours for the last decade. Perhaps it is the untimely resurrection of this famous *poupée* that outrages the sensibilities and leaves one after reading the book with the feeling of having been party to an indecency. Surely the baroque antiquity of such a quip as poem 299 (one of the "New Poems!")—

*Q:dwo*
*we know of anything which can*
*be as dull as one englishman*
*A:to*

should be locked under glass in the corner cuddy. The same is true of the notorious typography: its only virtue today lies in its quaint persistence as a historical curiosity. As for the sexires, they have multiplied, like the whimsies and typography, unchanged in kind and quality. All that needs to be said of them, once and for all, is that they are not very good on any level. They are inferior in both technique and spirit to such ballads as "Down In The Lehigh Valley" on the one hand, and on the other to popular songs like "My Handy Man." Compare, for instance, the prurient emasculation of poem 250: "may i feel said he (i'll squeal

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said she" to the epic sweep of: "The grass was gone for miles around Where Lil's white arse had bumped the ground"; or the hackneyed double entendre of poem 134 (the breaking in of a new car) with the rich imagery and invention of "My Handy Man." Even the serious sex poems are corrupted by prurience, sicklied o'er with sentimentality. They stem not from the great stream of the tradition, but from the minor tributary of cheap burlesque; they are more concerned with exhibition than enjoyment—like the strip-teaser with one eye on the censors and the cops in the back row.

The satires, which together with the sex poems are largely responsible for Cummings' popular reputation, very rarely deserve the name. They are more often bits of sarcasm, fancy invective, and nose-thumbings. The real fun we get from reading the best of them is derived not from their success as poems, but from the exhibition of a clever (and potentially serious) poet deliberately pointing his sophistications with vulgarities, his poetic language with gutter slang. It is the bald trick of incongruity—a popular one in burlesque, and is supported by many of the common devices. This one, for example, of the censored rhyme (cf. the ballad "Sweet Violets"):

*every kumrad is a bit*
*of quite unmitigated hate*

or the elaborate pun:

*a myth is as good as a smile . . .*
*. . . entitled a wraith's*
*progress or mainly awash while chiefly submerged*

or for closing lines the classic anti-climax of nonsense:

*it isn't snowing snow you know*
*it's snowing buttercups*

and

*for a bad cigar is a woman*
*but a gland is only a gland*)

Now there is no possible objection to either nonsense or doggerel when given and taken as such, though one may well dislike to have it sandwiched in with serious poems. The trouble here lies in the ambiguity. Apparently Cummings has cultivated the confusion of incongruities for so long that he himself is rarely certain to what degree or in what kind he wants to be serious. Similarly, he slips so easily into the jargon of newspaper, stage and street that he perfectly blunts the edge of what was meant to be indignation or bitterness. Thus, in one of his best and serious satires, the lines

*obey says toc, submit says tic*
*Eternity's a Five Year Plan*

give the effect of cant. The same triviality results in poem 214, a love ballad after the manner of Villon, which almost succeeds in overcoming its defects. In this case the jargon is that of musical comedy lyrics after Cole Porter or Kaufman.

*i am a birdcage without any bird*
*a collar looking for a dog, a kiss*

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*without lips; a prayer lacking any knees*

and again

*. . . a hand's impression in an empty glove*
*a soon forgotten tune, a house for lease.*

This mingling of the trivial and serious, and the general confusion of values throughout Cummings' work, is by no means accidental. It is a result of his deliberate rejection of knowledge, whether of himself or of life at large.

*that you should ever think, may god forbid . . .*
*for that way knowledge lies, the foetal grave*
*called progress and negation's dead undoom.*

This from the last poem in the volume. The consequences of Cummings' anti-intellectualism have been so carefully analyzed by R. P. Blackmur in his *Double Agent* that there is little else to be said of it. The *Collected Poems* merely confirms Blackmur's remarks. In the Introduction, for instance, Cummings writes: "Life, for eternal us, is now; and now is much too busy being a little more than everything to seem anything, catastrophic included." This is a typical Cummings statement, for while appearing to embrace and affirm, it actually reduces to negation and rejection. Likewise, the more he tries in the later poems to define his beliefs, the more he resorts to negatives. He likes to describe the philistine norms by the negative prefix: "unselves," "unlives," "unhearts," "unminds," etc.; but the trick merely shows up his own impoverished and fuzzy affirmations. He praises the "whyless-soul," the "general looseness of doom," the "mystery of growing," and life—"the one undiscoverable guess." But he himself does not grow in his poetry. Having rejected knowledge, the chiefest instrument of evaluation and the essential means to maturity, he can hardly be expected to offer more than the scattered impulses of an immature personality. The most revealing of his negative statements, which strikes one with the impact and illumination of an absolute truth, are the lines in poem 214:

*so that my life (which liked the sun and moon)*
*resembles something that has not occurred*

Substituting "poetry" for "life," the statement would have had even greater pertinency. As Mr. Blackmur has pointed out, his poetry offers notes and materials for poems rather than actually achieved poems. To give Cummings his due, he has written a handful of really good love sonnets and poems, which still deserve publication in a modest volume of their own. Excepting them, nothing much in the way of poetry has occurred.

PHILIP HORTON

## II

To the predictable exasperation of all right-thinking critics, the special miracle of Cummings, even under the severe strain of a collected edition, blithely persists, viable, inextinguishable, a fact. The indignation of our literary theologians is comprehensible enough: Cummings's faults stand right out—indeed, what Eliotellus in eight years has not,

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for his graduation piece, permanently annihilated him? Yet his poetry lives easily through such attack; for his faults are inseparably the faults of his virtues, and in those virtues—gusto, abundance, magniloquence—he is nearly unique.

Of course much of the critical animus against Cummings derives from American critics' ignorance of or dislike for the restless development of French poetry. Although René Taupin has perhaps oversharp eyes in seeing so much influence of Gourmont and Rimbaud in Cummings's work (Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* are admittedly more evident), it is nevertheless true that Cummings is more in the French than in the English stream. By and large, our poetry stems from French, our criticism from English influences; and since before Poe, there has been this exasperation of the Anglophile cataloguers that French poetry would neither stay put itself nor refrain from stimulating the poetry of other languages.

But apart from this, what essentially is the case usually brought against Cummings? Failure in exact communication, pretentiousness, execrable taste, and limitation of subject.

The poet whose primary interest is to communicate either fails entirely or, if he succeeds, does so on a abysmal level, for which prose would have served. The poet whose primary interest is, within the fair limits of language (private and secret Humpty-Dumpty use of words strictly barred), to express with the maximal accuracy, depth, and vividness his experience, by succeeding in that expression, succeeds in communication, i.e. the perfect recreation of that experience in the reader. It is simply this paradox which Luis Cardoza y Aragón crystallizes in his brilliant dictum: "where there is no miracle, there is no poetry."

Now the miracle of Cummings is indubitably heretical, conceivably satanic. His words do not, by limiting one another, construct an exact and unmistakable impression; each word, on the contrary, explosively releases in the reader as much of its total content of meanings and emotivity as the reader is capable of supporting. Hence the poem in Cummings's mind and in the reader's mind are two quite different variants of the poem, not in any wise identical but both of great potency. It is principally for this reason that his poems practically defy paraphrase into prose. The glaring non-sequitur of our theologians is to argue that, since the miracle is heretical, there is no miracle. To attempt to argue out of existence the notorious fact of Cummings's poetic power merely by (quite correctly) alleging that it is not canonical, is a petulant absurdity.

Similarly self-deceptive is the contention that Cummings is discredited by his pretentiousness. That timidity of opinion of which *New-Yorker*ism is the perfect flower may chidingly deprecate as bumptious the classic poetic quality of iactantia; but, whether one likes it or not, "exegi monumentum" happens to have proved itself a historically correct statement. It would not wholly amaze, though it might equally displease, if

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*the harder the wind blows the*
*taller i am*

proved equally so.

Cummings's taste is more difficult to defend; indeed, it is often quite indefensible. The retention of, for example, 43, "it may not always be so; and i say . . . ", is certainly a triumph more of courage than of prudence, though one cannot but admire the honest temerity of a récolte that is truly a collection, and not a selection; and in 47, "notice the convulsed orange inch of moon . . . ", the bathos of the last line is all too characteristic. These are not merely youthful lapses: examples could be multiplied from the poems, and the Introduction's self-identification with the aging Renoir faintly and frailly stinks. Yet the basic antithesis of today is less that of good *v* bad taste than that of taste *v* no-taste. Cummings, like the Italians, has, admirably, *a lot of* taste; it is merely regrettable that some of it is bad. But the bad is quite compensated for by a complete absence of the fashionable "perfect gray."

The accusation of undue limitation of subject, however, begins, by 1938, to carry much more weight. True enough, spring, love and death are large and universal subjects; but to make them a complete universe of discourse begins to suggest, after some sixteen years, a certain lack of sensibility, imagination, and courage. Especially in the bulk of a collected volume, there becomes apparent a cloying quality, a monotony of mere lusciousness, however spectacularly successful. It is yet somewhat early to assume, however, that Cummings's interests will never as consciously expand beyond this frame as they have to date been deliberately confined within it. One's *Collected Poems* often signalize the termination of a period. If at his present age he does not break through this eggshell into the world, he will remain, regrettably, a magnificent but minor singer; it is not impertinent to hope, however, that his present maturity will produce, with the impact of broader (and, after all, somewhat more interesting) experience upon this alert, sinewed and lusty talent, some further and deeper conclusion, beyond love-is-enough.

SHERRY MANGAN

## ODYSSEY IN A CIRCLE

JOURNEYS BETWEEN WARS: Odyssey of a Novelist. *By John Dos Passos. Harcourt, Brace.* $3.00.

For twenty years, between books, John Dos Passos has gone voyaging, shuttling, tramping in the Old World. He has been drawn mainly to the most picturesque and backward countries, the countries literally old, or else his notebooks are fullest of them. That which is picturesque and most unlike industrial places is what he has here recorded with special detail: Spain, the Orient, Mexico, the provincial U.S.S.R. These

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notes like water-colors—Dos Passos' water-colors—have been put together as in a gallery to make *Journeys Between Wars.*

The book contains what it probably Dos Passos' finest writing technically. He has cut, and illumined, and discovered rhythms and words. Stylistic elegance as of a Frenchman, lucid and musical language reclaim the trite and flamboyant subjects for literature-to-be-read-aloud. One need not mind about sequence. A page, a passage or maybe one sketch at a time is how this book is be enjoyed. Try to take it from cover to cover and it goes dull.

Why? Because there is no development. There is no story of changing facts. The scenery changes, the facts are the same, and they are, unbelievably always, "the old and the new" clichés. If in twenty years the facts remain the same (historically they don't, but the same human problems appear and reappear, and this may be what Dos Passos is getting at) that sameness is not dramatic except against some change. There are three points of reference in his material: mass events, individual stories, and the author himself. All three are handled as static "characters." So that when you have read one sketch, whatever its date or people or geography, you have read them all. The music varies but the intellectual and emotional content is the same, expressed at the same level of sub-intensity.

One keeps on expecting some shift of emphasis or depth or interpretation, because after all this is an honest and sensitive man writing, who in the beginning of the book has suggested himself propelled into the Spanish landscape *after* something: counterposing, in mind and in conversation, industrial life against peasant agrarian (the old and the new). In this part of the book he is himself an actor with the others he describes. Very shortly he drops the rôle (a kind of pilgrim character) and becomes the uninvolved observer of conventional newspaper reporting. What he writes then turns into travelogue, very fine of course but travelogue just the same.

There is a clue here, maybe, to the lack of impact of his trilogy characters: the author's set relation as spectator, sympathetic and shrewd, but carefully impersonal. He doesn't get inside the skins of any of the people with whom he has lived on his travels; their concerns are their concerns. It is the Orient, or the U.S.S.R., or whatever, (including Spain at war) unrolling before him distressfully, but affecting his own trajectory not more than would a movie. Can it be Dos Passos the artist has been taken in by the pseudo-scientific convention that neutrality is the necessary position for getting at life?

ANITA BRENNER

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